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Yellowstone Jack; OR, Trappers of the Enchanted Ground.

BY JOSEPH E. BADGER.

CHAPTER I. THE POWDEREE.

"It's no use—in less'n three shakes we'll ketch it, hot an' heavy!"

"But, Harris, we *must* reach the shelter of the rocks. Look yonder—'tis a hurricane! It will be death to meet it here, unprotected. Look beyond the point—see! the trees uprooted, the very rocks carried like feathers before the blast! On—whip up there—it's life or death now, boys!"

"Mules is poor critters to buck ag'inst the wind in a race, boss—but hev it so, though I 'vise ye to turn the critters head in, like a corral, sorter. That'll be

the devil an' all to pay when the animiles feel the fust lick—they'll stampede, shore!"

"Too late—we haven't aime—our only chance is the rocks yonder. Maynard—look to the democrat—push on ahead and save the girls—quick!"

With hoarse shouts, angry curses and imprecations, mingled with and given force by the stinging "blacksnake," the sharp crack of which echoed from side to side of Shicha-chetish* pass, the teamsters urged on the snorting, terrified mules, pausing not to pick the smoothest way, but bounding recklessly over the bowlders that thickly strewn the level bottom.

Of the six vehicles, five were huge, clumsy, deep-bedded wagons—true "prairie schooners"—heavily loaded, drawn each by six stout mules. Their drivers, each bestriding his "near-wheeler," plied tongue, spurs and whip without cessation. Other men ran alongside, flogging the bewildered animals, pricking them with knives until their sides and haunches were washed with blood.

*Literally, "Bad Wolf," though why so called, I do not know.

The sixth vehicle—that which the "boss" had called a "democrat"—was a light four-wheeled spring wagon, with oil-cloth cover, drawn by two stylish horses. The driver, a fiery-crested little fellow, evidently had his hands full, though manfully struggling to bring the maddened animals under wanted control. The unusual noise and confusion had so alarmed them that the utmost endeavors of Terence M'Carthy only served to keep their heads directed toward the overhanging cliff beyond.

Shicha-chetish pass, or canon, as it might almost as well be termed, closely resembles a gigantic letter Y, with its base pointing nearly due west. Upon either hand, divided by nearly one hundred feet of chalky soil, thickly strewn with bowlders of various sizes and shapes that had fallen from the sides of the pass, rose abruptly the walls of the canon, in a series of gigantic steps or plateaus. The first and largest step was considerably over a hundred feet in height, clear-cut and perpendicular, so smooth and regular that a cat could not have scaled it, unless aided by the scanty, straggling growth of parasitic plants that clung to the face of the chalky rock. Above this rose another and another step, until the



"WE'VE STRUCK A FAT STEAK IN HYAR. A FELT A TRAP FER A WEEK RUNNIN' AIN'T TO BE SNEERED AT."

top, where a dense growth of scrubby pines, cedars and pinons crowned the ridge. The base of the Y is some two miles in length; the arms a trifle longer. The lower branch—or the one tending to the northwest—was the one along which the emigrants had wound.

An hour previously, the day had been all that is expected of latter June; clear, warm, and inspiring. But there came a sudden change. The sky darkened, the sunshine assumed a blood-red tinge, the air suddenly died away to almost suffocating stillness. Men and cattle felt oppressed. They breathed with difficulty. Their skins were dry and parched. The searing atmosphere prevented perspiration. Instead of being among the mountains, where their yearning gaze could even then rest upon masses of boiling snow, they seemed to be in the midst of a desert, beneath the simoom's withering breath.

Bob Harris, an old trapper who had been picked up by the way, wounded, almost starving, though he had managed to escape with his scalp from the Blackfeet who had robbed him of animals, traps and peltries, told John Warren that he believed a storm—the terrible *poudreet*—was brewing. The guide, Chris Camp, scoffed at this idea. A snow-storm in summer—bah!

"Nobody but a fool—or *wuss*—d want us to camp hyar, whar the reds, ef so be they're nigh to han, ked bag us easy 's fallin' off a log. They ked crawl up 'ithin forty foot o' us, unseen—an' squash us like fum'le-bugs onder a wagon-wheel by rollin' rocks down on us from up thar. You say you're a fri'nd, old man—you talk more like one o' them cussed white Injuns!"

Warren checked the quarrel that threatened to end in bloodshed, by swearing he would shoot the man who first struck a blow, and then the train slowly moved on. It was but natural that Camp should be believed before Harris, since he had been with the train from Council Bluffs, while the other was a stranger.

But as the party entered the main portion of the pass, the sky grew more and more threatening. The oppressive heat subsided. Instead, came an icy-cold current that chilled man and beast to the bone. The fitful gusts increased in power and frequency, striking the emigrants fairly in the face, almost carrying them from their feet. The sun was hidden behind dull leaden clouds. Far away, just above the western horizon, could be seen a black cloud, rapidly increasing in size. Still Camp declared that they could reach the mouth of the pass in time. Upon the open ground, even if they had not time to reach secure shelter, they would be safer than in the narrow canon where the hurricane would be doubled in its force by the high walls.

The cloud advanced with frightful rapidity. Then came a dull, rumbling noise that resembled the thunders of a distant cataract, ever and anon breaking into prolonged echoes like the roll of thunder. The whirling gusts of wind blended into one steady blast, cold as the breath of an iceberg, seeming to pierce the very marrow—to cut the sensitive flesh like a keen knife. Footmen were prostrated—horses and mules staggered back—the canvas tilts of the wagons were torn into shreds.

Then came an abrupt lull. This blast was but the *avant courier* of the hurricane—of the *poudreet*. And in this interval were spoken the words that head this chapter.

The mouth of the pass was now in full view, scarce a quarter of a mile distant. Through it could be distinguished the abrupt spur of another mountain ridge, rising almost perpendicularly from the level. Under lee of this cliff the emigrants would be comparatively well sheltered from the storm.

The first force of the *poudreet* struck the projecting mass of verdure-clad rock. The deep, sullen warning of the hurricane abruptly changed its note—instead there now came the sharp, electric reverberations of a prolonged roll of masonry. The stiff, stubborn trees upon the mountain side were lashed furiously to and fro, then either broken short off or else torn up by the roots and carried far from their birthplace upon the mighty breath of the storm demon, and strewn thickly over the plain. Huge boulders were wrested from their repose and sent thundering adown the sloping mountain side and hurled bodily over the precipice. Clouds of dust, leaves and broken branches filled the air, as though seeking to hide this dread desolation from the eyes of man.

Then the cloud deepened—the mountain spur faded from view—the veil was no longer of dust. It was of snow, of sleet and ragged hailstones.

A moment later, and the *poudreet* swallowed up the emigrants. Its effects, though instantaneous, must be described in detail.

Frank Maynard, the young man whom John Warren had bidden look to the safety of those occupying the "democrat," was a little in advance, mounted upon a stout horse. The blast struck him, crushing both horse and rider to the earth with as little resistance as a blade of grass gives to the foot that rests upon it!

The occupants of the democrat were prostrated upon the seats, and the wind burst the stout oilskin curtains from their fastenings. The one upon the left side gave way first, and to this fact is probably owed what followed. Instead of being upset, the wagon was lifted up and whirled half-way around, so that it pressed firmly against the rock wall of the pass. The horses were thrown from their feet at the same moment, and half-rolled, half-dragged over and over, until their heads were pointing in the direction of the back trail.

The foremost wagon was served even worse. The mules, staggering beneath the first shock, whirled

abruptly to the right, "cramping" the wagon as it turned broadside to the hurricane, lifting a wheel clear off the ground. And thus the huge mass was prostrated.

Even above the roar of the tornado, the crashing of wood, there arose a shriek of agony. Somebody—at least one human being had been stricken down by the falling wagon.

Mules, horses and cattle were overthrown. Men were carried from their feet and then dashed violently to the ground or against the jagged boulders, yards away. Fragments of rock began to thunder down the series of gigantic steps, threatening the unfortunate emigrants with new peril.

Snow and sleet and hailstones—the latter rough and ragged, as though composed of several smaller ones, frozen together as they came in contact, forming masses of ice large as a man's clenched fist—were driven with frightful force. Death seemed inevitable.

Fortunate indeed was it that these masses of ice were only carried upon the front of the tornado. A single moment—then there came a brief lull; the lull before the tornado.

Yet in that single moment the bewildered horses that were attached to the democrat struggled to their feet, bruised and bleeding, half-mad. The sudden start dragged Terence McCarthy forcibly from the seat upon which he was lying, even in that dire confusion tightly clutching the reins. He was hurled headlong beneath the fore wheels.

Then the fierce wind again howled through the pass with renewed vigor. It struck the democrat, forcing the light vehicle against the trembling animals' haunches. With a mad scream in unison, they bounded forward, by what seemed a miracle, passing over the struggling pile of mules attached to the overturned wagon, and then disappeared in the storm.

Only one human eye had seen them dash by. Frank Maynard had been hurled from the saddle, and thus escaped being crushed beneath his falling horse. He managed to scramble to his feet during the momentary lull. It was more than the love of life that inspired him. He was thinking of others—or rather of another—of Minnie Warren.

With a desperate wrench he half-lifted his confused animal erect, and leaped into the saddle as he saw the democrat and its priceless freight dash past him. And then, as the renewed blast struck him, he plunged his spurs more deep into his horse's flanks, and darted forward.

All this transpired with the rapidity of thought. Scarce ten seconds had elapsed from the first striking of the *poudreet* till the strange chase was hidden in the storm-cloud of snow and hail, of twisted boughs and shattered rock.

It was a wild, reckless chase—one that no really sane man could have attempted with any hopes of success. Yet Maynard never once gave thought to his own danger. He only knew that his more than life was threatened with death, and he plied spurs and bridle-reins, hoarsely shouting to his horse, that, mad with terror, plunged blindly forward, stumbling over boulders and limbs of trees, slipping upon the hailstones, yet, through some strange providence keeping its feet. Surely 'twas neither its own activity nor the skill of its rider that avoided a fall, where to fall would be death.

Yet a gleam of reason returned to Maynard in time to prevent a fatal error. As they neared the spot where the arms of the Y merged into the main stem, the horse naturally hugged the right-hand wall; for that was the course he had followed in coming—he was upon the back track. Maynard glanced down. He saw that the tracks left by the democrat in the snow and hailstones bore to the left. Though so rapidly filling up, there could be no doubt of this. And he wrenched his animal's head around toward the upper pass. The horse stumbled and fell to its knees. But the taut rein lifted him forcibly, and the next moment he plunged into the unknown pass.

Whither did it lead? What would be the ending of this mad, reckless chase?

The pass was very much like the one already described, excepting that it was on a smaller scale. The width of level ground between the towering steps or plateaus, was barely fifty feet, and fully one-half of this was barred and choked up by the fragments of soft rock that had fallen from the cliffs. Yet, through this narrow passage the maddened horses had evidently carried the light spring wagon with its precious freight, for now, despite the driving snowstorm, Maynard could plainly distinguish the trail—he even fancied he could hear the thunder of iron-shod hoofs before him through the deafening clamor of the raging tornado. And with hopes reviving in his bosom he urged on his terrified animal. He did not feel the icy breath of the *poudreet*, though it was fast stiffening his every limb. He had thought only of his loved one and her peril.

He leaned impatiently forward and sought to pierce the cloud of whirling snow. He could not fairly distinguish the towering cliffs that were upon either hand. In front there seemed nothing but driving snow and clattering hailstones. Then came a sudden change. Though the force of the wind seemed to increase, if anything, the hail ceased and the snowflakes became fewer.

A hoarse, inarticulate cry broke from Maynard's lips. He could now distinguish the sleet-coated

* A party was caught in a similar hailstorm while cutting hay on the Kansas prairies, in '62. We saved ourselves by crawling beneath the half-loaded wagon. Two of our horses were killed by the hailstones. A man and his horse were found dead; his skull was fractured. After the storm, we picked up hailstones larger than a man's clenched fist.—AUTHOR.

wagon. The terrified horses were still fleeing at top speed, aided, rather than retarded, by the democrat. At times a fierce gust of wind would hurl the vehicle fairly against their haunches. They could not have paused in their mad career, while the tornado urged them on, and keep their feet. To fall would be almost certain destruction.

The back curtains were driven in by the force of the wind. Maynard could just distinguish the light drapery of a woman. It was the dress worn by Ada Dixon.

Minnie—where was she? He could see nothing of her. Had she been thrown out during the mad race? Had he passed her unseen along the trail?

A groan of heartrending agony burst from Maynard's lips as the thought struck him. A vision of her mangled body lying among the cruel, jagged boulders danced before his eyes. It seemed so real, that he reeled in his saddle—the rein dropped from his benumbed hand—and as his horse stumbled, the young man was cast forward upon the animal's neck.

Mechanically clutching the thick mane, Maynard slipped back in the saddle as his horse arose. And the mad race swept on.

"Help! for the love of God! Frank, save—"

The words came indistinctly to his ear, and he saw Ada slightly lift her head: but then a severe jolt again cast her beneath the seat.

The appeal thoroughly aroused Maynard. He saw that at least one life depended upon his exertions. With a cry of encouragement he urged his horse on.

A ray of hope flashed upon him. He saw that the pass ended only a few hundred yards ahead. He could distinguish a low line of something dark—it must be bushes, growing upon the open ground beyond.

Then a fierce blast of wind drives the snow-cloud aside. A cry of horror bursts from his lips. He draws his knife and mercilessly pricks his horse. Death—a horrible death yawns before the runaways and their helpless freight. The bushes are tree-tops, whose trunks are hidden from view! They grow in a ravine, or upon the side of a fathomless canon. And the terror-blinded animals plunge furiously toward it!

He thrusts his knife deep into his horse's hip, and leaves it rankling in the wound as he draws his revolver. The horse shrieks with pain, but he can do no more, where he is already doing his best.

The hammer falls. The cap explodes—but no report follows.

And the mad animals plunge on to their death!

CHAPTER II.

"BIRDS OF A FEATHER."

"The dogs are beginning to growl, are they! Let them dare show their teeth to me, and the devil will have a feast before his time! Chief I am and chief I will be; enough for them that I lead the way."

These words were uttered *sotto voce* by a man who stood leaning carelessly against the trunk of a cottonwood tree, his dark eyes roving over the scene before him, one hand instinctively caressing the polished butt of a revolver.

There was nothing remarkable about this personage, if his eyes be excepted. They were large, unusually brilliant, of a jetty blackness. At times languid, sleepy, they could fill with a mesmeric fire powerful enough to subdue the rising passions of a hungry wild beast; at such times the twin orbs seemed to pierce one through and through, to read one's inmost thoughts, to awe the most reckless spirit.

He was neither handsome nor ugly, in face; of medium size, though rather broad-shouldered. His frame was one that would not attract a second glance in a crowd, yet a connoisseur would have declared this man possessed of extraordinary strength and activity.

Before him, stretched at ease upon the greensward in the shade cast by a group of young cottonwoods, were nearly a score of men. Their masks of shaggy, ill-kempt hair and beard more than their color or dress, proclaimed these men of Anglo-Saxon lineage. Their garb partook more of the savage—only no Indian could curse and blaspheme so fluently.

One of them, a squat, red-haired Caliban, seemed especially discontented, and his voice was louder than he probably intended, as he uttered the words:

"I say it's too durned thin! What'd he promise us? Money, hosses, mules, goods—lots o' it. Whar is it? Jest whar it war afo' we started. Whose fault is it? Our'n? Not much! It's his. We hed the chaine las' night—we hev the chaine now; why don't he let us bounce 'em? Gleebe he wants the red-skins to git in ahead o' us. Who is he, anyhow? Kin anybody—"

"Cheese it, Firetop—look yender!" hastily muttered one of the discontented villain's comrades, fairly turning a dirty gray, as he quickly rolled away from the spot.

Firetop glanced up, and then his brilliant crest dropped. A revolver muzzle was staring him full in the face, held by the man who still leaned carelessly against the tree-trunk. The magnetic black eye shone like a coal of fire above the polished tube, and held the gaze of the discontent, surely as the diamond orbs of a rattlesnake enchain the fluttering bird.

"I can tell you, Sandy Ben—your master, dog! Stand up—fool! d'y' think I'll give ye time to draw that pistol? Hold up your hands—I'll not warn ye twice. There—now ask me your questions."

The squat ruffian sullenly rose erect and held up his unarmed hands as ordered, though it was evident he would gladly have rebelled, had he seen one chance of doing so successfully. But he knew that any such attempt would be rewarded with a half-ounce of lead.

† I spell this as it is pronounced; whether correct or not, I do not know.

"Speak up! what were you growling about?"
 "If you heered me at all, you know well enough," sullenly.

"No impudence—I've asked you twice. The third time 'twill be through my revolver."
 "If you're sp'illin' to shoot, why don't ye blaze away? 'Twon't be the fust time 'at I've smelt burnt powder."

"This will be the last time, if you don't—"
 "Injuns! look out, Cap—ahind ye, thar!" sullenly yelled Sandy Ben, leaping quickly aside.

The leader of this rough band involuntarily turned his head, to glance behind him. And a revolver-bullet grazed his cheek, severing a lock of the silken whiskers in its passage.

Quick as thought the half-dropped pistol was leveled, and a second report followed the first, like an echo. Without a groan, Sandy Ben wheeled half around, throwing up his arms, the still smoking revolver dropping from his nerveless grasp; then he fell forward upon his face, dead, shot through the brain.

The chief was still leaning against the trunk, nor did he move as the men simultaneously sprang to their feet with drawn weapons, other than to lift the hammer of his revolver. His face was calm, though his eyes seemed to emit a phosphorescent gleam, as he spoke.

"A shot for a shot—'tis true prairie law. But if any one of you object, I will be happy to accommodate you."

"The boss is right, boys," said a tall, gaunt specimen of humanity. "Sandy Ben pulled fust—an' sence the durned greeny couldn't shoot no better'n that, why, he'd orter kick the bucket. Miss the size of a man at fifteen ya—ds—git out!"

This characteristic speech turned the tide, and the threatened mutiny died out. The slayer of Sandy Ben now appeared an entirely different person. He was as affable as he had been stern and haughty.

"Thank you, my lads—we'll get on finey, now. Sandy Ben was the only fool among you—he thought he could drive me, by hot words. But enough of him—roll the carrion into the creek—then listen. I will tell you, now, just what my plans are. I intend to doin' so all along, but he would have said that fear of him made me."

"You know this much, that my name is Mat Mole, that I hired you at fifty dollars per month, to do a job of work for me. You know that this job is connected with the emigrant train ahead of us, but nothing more. As the hour for winding up the job is now at hand, I'll tell you my whole plans."

"You know that John Warren is boss of this train. He is my enemy. The man that shows me his scalp, I will pay double wages when we return to Council Bluffs."

"There are two women with the train—Warren's daughter and niece. His daughter—the brown-haired one—must be mine, unharmed. The other you can dispose of—by drawing lots, or by cards, just as you choose."

"Warren is bound for the coast of California, where he expects to make a fortune in the hide and tallow trade. His brother wrote him to come—that he had made nearly a million in five years. Warren sold out, and is taking his money along. He has over two thousand dollars in gold with him. This sum you can divide between you. I ask nothing, only that you help me in getting his daughter."

The men cheered loudly at this intelligence. At that moment they would have charged death itself, had Mat Mole desired them.

"You have wondered why I did not strike at once—why I have delayed so long, and thrown away so many fair opportunities. Well, I am a man that likes to make all sure, before I show my hand. Not one of this party must escape with their lives. They are nearly double our force. Even if we had surprised them, as we might have done a score of times, there would have been a tough fight, and some of them might have got away. Now, if they escape us, the Indians will pick them up before they can reach safety."

"What's to hinder the varmints from pickin' us up, as well?" asked Tobin, the tall man.

"We are in the Blackfoot country, and I can do with them whatever I will. They will aid, not oppose us. Besides, we have a friend with these emigrants. Their guide is in my pay. You see how far they have wandered from the right trail. Well, we have Chris Camp to thank for that. You know the trouble I have taken to lay false 'sign' around their camps. Chris read that as I bade him. Under the pretense of giving the Blackfeet the slip, he has led them into the very heart of the Blackfoot country. This night, if everything works well, we will finish our job, and—"

A low, peculiar whistle echoed from down the shallow stream, interrupting Mat Mole in his speech. The men seemed to recognize the signal, but when it was repeated, with a different cadence, each man sprang for his rifle. Even Mole appeared startled.

The next moment a tall, lithe figure glided into view, and approached Mat Mole.

"What is it, Vern?" asked the leader.

"Indians—two-score—trailing us," was the quick reply. "Blackfeet, I think. They were too close for me to lose any time. They are painted for the war-path."

"Then it's all right. Boys, I see you forget what I told you. These Blackfeet will be our allies, not enemies, if we will share with them. They need not know anything about the gold—you can afford to let them have the mules. But cache yourselves, and wait. Watch me close. Agree to everything I say, and all will be well."

"We can whip them, captain," muttered the scout.

"No need. Don't you see we can make these fools play cat to our monkey? They may burn their fin-

gers, but they will do our work and save us much trouble and some few lives. But there—I must go meet them."

Mat Mole glided down the creek, quickly disappearing amid the undergrowth. His men promptly cached themselves, their weapons in readiness for use in case their leader's confidence should be misplaced.

The scout alone appeared dissatisfied. He would rather have met the Blackfeet as enemies. And when it is said that his father's scalp hung in the smoke of a Blackfoot lodge, the sentiment is not strange.

Vernon Campbell was a character in his way. Ten years before—when he was barely fifteen—his last relative had been killed, and he taken prisoner by the Blackfeet. Six months later he managed to escape, by killing his adopted father and brother, stealing a couple of horses, and reached the settlements in safety, though pursued for two days and nights. Since then he had devoted his life to hunting Indians. Young as he was, his deeds were well known among the Blackfeet, and his name was a terror to them. He had joined Mole, on learning they were bound for the Blackfoot country, without asking the object of their journey.

He was tall, lithe, straight as an Indian, an adept in all athletic sports, a perfect master of his weapons, and one of the surest trailers in the West. His features were regular, almost classic in their outline. His fair hair hung in slightly-curling locks, below his shoulders. His face was perfectly smooth. Like the Indians, he assiduously plucked all superfluous hair from his face. His garb was plain, formed wholly of Indian-dressed buck-skin, neither fringed nor ornamented. A round, tight-fitting skull-cap of buck-skin covered his head. His eyes needed no protection. If need be, he could gaze at the noon-day sun without dimming their luster.

Mat Mole glided rapidly down the creek-bank, using considerable caution, but more as if from force of habit than because he apprehended danger. And yet he was almost within hearing of a Blackfoot war-party—those most inveterate enemies of the white race.

He paused upon the edge of the undergrowth. Before him lay full half a mile of valley that was perfectly free of trees or bushes, the ground covered with naught save a short, close-curling grass. Up this valley the pale-faces had passed on the preceding evening.

Their trailers will not be far in advance," muttered Mole. "They won't dream we are so near, as the trail is full fifteen hours old. I don't think there'll be any trouble, though 'tis ten years and more since I left them."

A few moments later Mat Mole saw two footmen enter the open ground, gliding rapidly forward, their heads bowed like hounds running by scent. Before these trailers had passed over half the space, a strong body of horsemen followed upon their track. Mole gazed keenly at them, but the bright rays of the sun glinting across the freshly-painted and oiled faces, baffled him. He could only tell that this was indeed a Blackfoot war-party.

Placing a hand to his mouth, Mat Mole pealed forth the shrill, unearthly war-whoop of the Kainna Blackfeet. It was heard distinctly, and the savage riders instantly drew rein, glaring toward the timber in surprise. Then came a long-drawn, peculiar yell, dying away in a quivering wail; a yell that has chilled many a bold heart—for it was a startling imitation of the panther's cry. It was Mat Mole's "totem."

The Blackfeet seemed to recognize the yell, and as the white man boldly emerged from the brush a gayly-bedizened chief galloped forward to meet him. A slight exclamation of joy broke from Mole's lips, for he recognized in the chief an old-time friend and comrade, Neepaughweese, or the "Night-Walker."

The meeting was cordial upon both sides, and quite a long conversation ensued. The Blackfeet were glad to learn that Creeping Panther was still living, though they had heard he had long since been dispatched to the happy hunting-grounds by a white snake, who, fearing to meet the eye of a brave, crept up and struck him from behind. On the other hand, Creeping Panther had not forgotten his red brethren, but had brought them a band of stout braves, whose hearts were red, though their skins were pale, to help fight their battles. And, too, he had driven before him a rich wagon-train filled with goods, and attended by plenty of good scalps, to prove that he had not forgotten his red friends. He had kept the hatchets of the Atoes and Sioux away from them, that the Blackfeet might not be robbed of their prize. The Blackfeet were to have the horses, the mules, the goods and wagons, all except two poor squaws that he had said must help fill his lodge.

This speech was most graciously received. The Night-Walker pledged himself to greet Creeping Panther's warriors as brothers; together they would despoil the train. And with this understanding the party hastened on up the creek.

Nearing camp, Mole gave the signal that all was well, and a minute later the allies were grouped together on the most amicable footing. All except Vernon Campbell. He stood apart, sullen and discontented, his weapons ready for use in case he should be recognized. But he had changed greatly since his captivity, and not one of the Blackfeet suspected this young stripling of being that dreaded scourge of their race, Pacanne-puck-on-che-luk, or the "Man that drinks blood."

Evidently Mat Mole distrusted the self-control of Vernon, for he bade him set forth and dog the emigrants to their night-camp. As though glad to put temptation behind him, Campbell left the camp.

Mole and the Night-Walker quickly arranged their plans, Mole translating the agreement for his followers' benefit. The Blackfeet were to do the most of the work, which was but natural, since they

were to have the largest share of the plunder, if not the most valuable.

The council was abruptly broken up by the storm, that had long been brewing. Warned by the weatherwise Indians, the adventurers took their horses down the valley to the open ground, and then threw them, securely tying their legs. Shrouded in their blankets, the men crouched down behind their animals' bodies, and awaited the *poudree*.

It came in all its fury—the wind, the sleet, the snow, the hail—not even Night-Walker had ever witnessed such a terrible storm. It seemed as though the end of the world had come.

CHAPTER III.

THE SPIRIT OF THE ENCHANTED VALLEY.

"WAGH!"

"What is 't, boyee?"

"Sign—Blackfoot, I reckon."

"Two sizes—toes p'inted up, to'rds our cache—no back trail. A blind man could read it, boyees. These imps may not hev come hyer lookin' for us in preticklar, but they must 'a' seed our sign up the valley, 'less they're plum blind. What then? Why they'll puckachee a'ter help to come back an' raise our pelts."

"I reckon we'd better puckachee,* then," suggested one.

"An' I reckon no. We've struck a fat streak in hyar. A pelt a trap fer a week runnin' ain't to be sneezed at. Then shell we puckachee jist beca'se we run on a couple o' Injun huff-marks in the sand? I reckon you're jist a-coddin', Brindle Joe."

"Jist es you say, Yallerstone—don't matter to me."

"Waal, hunker down hyar; the varmints mought sight us afore we got a good ready. Now, lis'en. You fellers said you'd let me choose our trail on this trip. You see'd that I didn't lie to ye 'bout the fur hyar. You know thar's plenty more 'round. Now, shell we stick it out a little longer, or shell we go an' tell the brigade of our find? Ef they come, our sheer 'll be smaller, but we'll be strong enough then to laugh at the hull Blackfoot tribe. What shell we do?"

"Do jist es you say, old man," promptly replied Brindle Joe.

"I knowed it—I knowed you was true grit, el'ar to the backbone! Ef you'd 'a' said defrunt, Brindle Joe, I'd 'a' bin disa'p'inted in my old pard. But thar—I reckon we've got other work than to gass all day. Joe, you a' Mexy come wi' me. Hoosier, you an' Heelyt Hank cache hyar, an' ef a red comes down this way, save 'im 'thout burnin' powder, ef possible, but save 'im dead to rights. Understand?"

Yellowstone Jack and his comrades glided rapidly but stealthily up the valley, leaving their two friends in ambush behind them.

These men, with one other, who had been found, arrow-pierced and scalpless, upon his "run," three days before, had joined the brigade under command of the veteran, "Old Jim Bridger," for the "spring hunt." Yellowstone Jack, a "prime hand," despite his youth, had gained leave to take a few comrades with him to visit a secret preserve of his own. Bridger granted this request the more readily that he knew the Indians, into whose country they had penetrated, were most likely fully engaged with their hunting further south-east. Until this "meat-making" was completed, they would have little time for aught else.

The little party met with extraordinary success. Scarce a trap was set that did not nightly contain a beaver or an otter. And though spring furs, being lighter, are less in price than the winter pelts, the adventurers were in high glee as they calculated the profits of the trip. How many pleasures—what glorious drunks—how many nights of delirious gaming could be had with their earnings!

Yet all was not serene. There was something about them that they could not understand. During the past two weeks they had caught occasional glimpses of a woman—of what appeared to be a marvelously beautiful and graceful girl. But could a human being appear and vanish so abruptly, so mysteriously? Was it not—and those bold heart, who would have faced scores of bloodthirsty enemies without flinching a hair's-breadth, drew closer together as they read the same suspicion in each other's eyes—was it not rather a *spirit*?

A trapper is nothing, if not superstitious.

Then came the murder of their comrade. He had been shot with an arrow, then scalped. But the fatal weapon had been carefully removed from the wound. The banks of the stream bore no impression of human feet, save those of the unfortunate trapper, though the body lay in open ground, a score or more yards from the water. Could a warrior have passed over that sward of soft young grass without leaving a trail? Yet those keen-eyed men, their perception sharpened by a burning thirst for revenge, could discover nothing.

Still they continued their rounds, but always rendezvoused at a given point before venturing into the valley where they made their head-quarters, lest an ambush should have been laid there to cut them off one by one as they returned from visiting their traps.

Yellowstone Jack peered cautiously from his covert behind the point of rocks that barred from view the upper end of the romantic little valley, or *cul de sac*, to speak more correctly, that served as their retreat. A deadly fire kindled in his blue eyes as he lastly withdrew his head.

"The varmints is sneakin' down this way—ready,

* An Indian term equivalent to beating a hasty retreat, to "skedaddle," "ramose," etc. Though derived from the Kickapoo, this term is in general use among both red-skin and white.

† Gila—pronounced "Heely" by the the mountaineers.

boyes!" he gritted, drawing the stout-bladed butcher-knife from his belt, and preparing for a forward leap.

Only a few yards off two dusky, shining-skinned forms glided crouching along through the scattered shrubbery. They were Indians—the same, beyond a doubt, who had made the trail that sharp-eyed Brindle Joe detected.

The trappers had only one thought. Vengeance for their murdered comrade was within their grasp. It was enough that these intruders were red-men. They could not be friends.

"Sock it to 'em, boys!" gritted Yellowstone Jack, as he leaped upon the foremost savage with the unerring aim of a lurking carajou who for hours has patiently watched for the unconscious victim to pass beneath its perch.

There was little or no struggle. Quick and deadly as the lightning's flash, Yellowstone buried his knife half-deep in the savage's heaving chest, and then bore him heavily backward, stifling in his throat the convulsive death-shriek that otherwise would have rung out in all its fierce agony. Then—with one horrible shudder, the rigid limbs relaxed. The spirit of the red-man had fled.

"Whoo-oo!" uttered Yellowstone, but in a subdued tone, as he turned around just in time to see Brindle Joe arise from the corpse of his antagonist. "I reckon Fatty Smith 'a grin now, ef he could on'y see how we make our words good—though his skelp was wuth a dozen sech pelts es these!"

"Carrai!" you big varmints don't give a little man fair show—you take all the fun, like boys!" grumbled the little Mexican, Chavez.

"Better luck next time, babby. Thar wasn't time fer drawin' lots. But see—lift thar ha'r, while I go see ef all's right wi'—"

"Ge-thunder! look yender!" muttered Brindle Joe, pointing across the valley, his deeply-bronzed and grotesquely-freckled face—from which his *nom de guerre* was derived—turning a shade lighter.

"The—the spirit!" breathed Yellowstone, in a tone of awe.

Upon a slender point of rock that jutted out from the face of the almost perpendicular cliff, stood a fairy-like figure, clearly outlined against the gray rocks. The figure of a woman, or rather that of a girl, just budding into womanhood. Her features could not be distinguished clearly, though the awe-stricken trappers could see that her skin was dusky, olive tinted; her hair, floating free in the light breeze, was jetty black. Her garb was plain, unornamented, even rude, seemingly composed of skins with the hair still on, her arms bare to the shoulder. In one hand she held a white bow; the other was just plucking an arrow from the quiver at her back. Then the bow was bent until the feathered shaft fairly brushed her ear, and when the string relaxed, the missile hurtled through the air, quivering deep in the ground several yards behind the trappers, as she uttered, in a clear, musical voice, speaking the Kainna-Blackfoot dialect:

"I have warned you—beware!"

"Thar's somethin' fastened on the arrear-head," whispered Brindle Joe, whose eyes were like a hawk's.

Yellowstone Jack, closely followed by his comrades, ran to the spot where the arrow had fallen, and as the young trapper pulled it from its earthen sheath, he detected a strip of buck-skin wound round the shaft. Unloosening this, he eagerly gazed upon the small, curious symbols portrayed in red upon the white skin. Then the puzzled trapper turned to Brindle Joe, that worthy was staring in open-mouthed astonishment, pointing toward the cliff. The figure had vanished.

"I knowed 'twas a spook—reckon we'd better puckachee, afore wuss comes on 't," he muttered, hoarsely.

"Yender comes the boys—mebbe they've see'd it, too."

As Yellowstone Jack spoke, the other two trappers came up the valley, their faces wearing a strange, uneasy expression. It was plain that they too had seen the spirit, and knew not how to account for it.

"D'y' see the thing go?" faltered Hoosier, glancing nervously around, as though half-expecting to behold the mysterious being suddenly reappear at his elbow.

"No—how was it?" Yellowstone asked.

"Jest nat'ally riz an' flew up to the top thar—an' you bin see, a mountain goat couldn't find toe-holt whar she went," uneasily replied the Hoosier. "She just made a few signs, like she wanted to do somethin' an' then faded away like smoke."

"I reckon she wanted us to mind what she says on this bit o' hide—look at it. Mebbe you kin make somethin' out o' it—I can't."

"It's 'ritin'—I know that much," slowly replied Heely Hank. "I've kerried more'n one bit o' sech like, what Old Sam slung off, when we war skrimmagin' wi' the Greasers fer Texas. But I can't read sech sign—it's a blind trail to me."

"My old man was powerful on them things, but somehow I never was no gre't shakes at it," feebly muttered Hoosier.

"Ef 'twas beaver now, or red-skin—but never mind. I'll keep it anyhow. Don't reckon it kin hurt a feller, ef 't did come from a sperit. I don't reckon she means us any bad, or she'd 'a sent this arrear a leetle closter. It's Blackfoot, though—they ain't gen'ally the kind we mountaineer men call fri'nds."

"Reckon she meant we'd better puckachee!"

"You kin make tracks fer the Br'ade, jest's soon's ye feel a mind, Brindle Joe—but the beaver don't go ontel he kin see both eer's o' the trail. Boyees, you hear me! I'm goin' to find out what that critter meant—what she wants, and who she is,

if it takes my last ante. Yallerstone Jack says it—which is me!"

The men stared at him in mute amazement. They could not understand this kind of courage. Not one among them but could have faced death without a tremor, but this was different. What could skill or brute courage avail against a spook—a spirit?

"Mebbe she is a spook—I don't know. They say there is sech things in these parts. But I b'lieve she's a good one, then. I don't think she'd do a feller any real hurt. Anyhow, I'm goin' to try it on. Ef she's human, she's bound to leave some sort o' trail ahind her, an' I kin find it by goin' over the ridge, I reckon. You fellers kin stay here; ef I don't come back—"

"Ef you're bound to go, Yallerstone, I'm wi' ye. Brindle Joe mayn't be much a'count, but he don't go back on a pardner," quietly said the trapper, though his cheek was still pale.

"We'll go in a caboodle, then," added Heely Hank.

"Five mountain men'd orter be a match for the devil hisself, let alone a teeny spook like that."

"Le's pitch this car'on into the bresh, then. Thar ain't time to clean up the muss, but I don't reckon any one 'll come this way afore we git back," observed Yellowstone Jack, setting the example himself.

A few moments later the little party had passed out of the valley, reaching a point where the southern ridge might be scaled by an active, quick-eyed, sure-footed man, and then they peered curiously down into the adjoining valley.

In this valley they had first noticed the spirit, who had as suddenly disappeared, without leaving any trace behind her, had vanished as completely and mysteriously as though she had dissolved into thin air.

The surroundings, too, were well calculated to arouse the superstition of the trappers. This valley had a reputation second only to that popularly known among them as the "Devil's Kitchen," near Eustis Lake. Many an unlucky trapper had journeyed thither to "make medicine" at the Boiling Springs: many a fabulous tale was solemnly told of the strange sights witnessed, of the maddening temptations resisted, of the marrow-curdling combats with spirits, spooks, goblins, and even with the master of evil himself. Implicit belief in these wild legends and traditions is a genuine mountain man's religion—too frequently his only one. 'Twould be a bold man who would openly doubt these marvels.

"I can't see any livin' critter, unless 't might be them black-tail," muttered Yellowstone Jack.

"Look beyond the white mound, yender—I kin see somethin'—looks like a two-legged critter skuttin' in the shade o' that bush-pine," added Brindle Joe.

"I can't match eyes wi' you, pard—on'y wish 't I could. But ef you say so, I reckon it's thar. Come—we kin git down under kiver o' this bresh easy enough, an' then creep up ahind the mound."

Now, that they had fairly entered upon the adventure, not one of the party betrayed any hesitation. Yellowstone Jack led the way, the others close at his heels. Nor did they neglect any of their usual precautions, but kept a keen look-out in every direction, not knowing what moment might bring a score of vengeful, bloodthirsty enemies upon them.

The bottom of the valley was almost devoid of living vegetation. All around were scattered little mounds and miniature hills, of a dirty, ashen-gray hue, that afforded the trappers sufficient cover, thoroughly skilled as they were in the art of stalking. Here and there tiny jets of foul-smelling vapor issued from the cracked surface. A dull, subdued, rumbling sound came from beneath their feet, and more than once the crust seemed to shake beneath their stealthy footfalls.

Cautiously Yellowstone Jack skirted the curious, truncated cone, that seemed composed of a dirty soda, and peered around the base of a broken column. A little cry of wonder broke from his lips. He saw two strange figures running swiftly toward him. One was undoubtedly the spirit they had seen upon the face of the cliff. The other appeared to be an old woman, wild and weird-looking, her long snow-white hair floating behind her, her limbs only partially protected by rudely-stitched skins.

The two strange beings ran swiftly on until nearly opposite the trappers. Then they paused upon the brink of a large boiling spring, which, in past ages, had thrown up a calcareous deposit, forming a "curb" nearly ten feet above the level. Upon this "curb" the two women now stood, gazing upon the astonished trappers, who had not moved a muscle since their appearance.

The eldest being grasped a bow held by her companion, and notched an arrow, as she uttered a few words in a shrill, cracked voice. Though evidently addressed to them, the trappers made no reply. Indeed, had not they been so bewildered, they would not have known what to say, since the words were strange to their ears.

"Go—leave this place—the Queen of the Boiling Springs warns you—beware how you anger her!" uttered the younger being, in the clear, musical voice they had heard before.

"The devil, more likely!" muttered Chavez, too much of a daredevil for aught to cow him long. "I have one silver button left—I'll try her with that."

"Hold! don't fire, man—they're wimmen!" cried Yellowstone Jack, striking up the leveled rifle, though not in time to save the shot, though the silver button whistled far above the head of the witch.

His hand was still grasping the rifle, when a flash of light seemed to blind his eyes, and he started back. Chavez flung up his hands and fell back, without a groan, a feathered shaft transfixing his throat.

"My God! look yender!" gasped Brindle Joe.

With a shrill, eldritch scream of laughter, the hag raised her hands and then plunged headforemost

into the boiling, bubbling caldron. And the next moment the younger being ~~plunged headforemost~~ A sullen splash—

CHAPTER IV.

A FRIENDLY ENEMY.

A cry of horror broke from the lips of Frank Maynard as the faithless pistol failed him. A cloud seemed to pass before his eyes. For a moment it seemed as though he would have fallen from the saddle as his tortured horse plunged blindly forward.

The terrified animals that were attached to the democrat still dashed on, each bound carrying them still nearer the frightful death that now seemed inevitable.

With an effort of will almost superhuman, Maynard crushed down the horror that well-nigh paralyzed both hand and brain, and once more leveled his revolver. The chance was a faint one. A wound, unless instantaneously fatal, would only precipitate the catastrophe. Yet it was the only chance.

"God have mercy on them now!"

These words burst from the young man's lips, as the hammer fell, for the second time, with a sullen click upon the tube. He knew not that his weapons had been rendered useless by the driving rain that had heralded the terrible *pouderée*. And, knowing that he was powerless to aid, he covered his eyes with his trembling hands.

The sharp, spiteful crack of a rifle saluted his ear, even above the howling of the tempest, and, amazed, he uncovered his eyes. At first he could distinguish nothing save a confused, struggling mass, rendered indistinct by a flurry of snow, borne upon the wing of an eddying whirlwind. Then, with an arm of iron, he checked the mad career of his animal, just in time to keep it from stumbling headlong over the upset democrat.

What had happened?

When the maddened horses were seemingly just about to plunge down the canon—when less than a dozen yards of level ground divided them from the abyss, a single rifle-ball whistled from behind a bowlder hard by, and tore its way through the near horse's brain. With one spasmodic bound it fell dead, dragging with it its mate, whose hoofs slipped up on the carpet of snow and ice.

The light wagon was whirled sideways, and overturned. The occupants were cast out with violence.

The off horse scrambled to its feet, and, madly plunging, sought to free itself. The traces held firm. The light wagon was jerked along. The dead horse was moved a few feet. One of the insensible women was rudely twitched around, so that her head pointed toward the abyss.

It was Minnie. She had managed to secure the reins, and, winding them around her arms, had tried to check the runaways. Even now, while unconscious, her fingers closed tightly upon the leathern lines. And the terrified plunging of the shrieking animal threatened to drag her over the escarpment—to death.

Thus matters were when Frank Maynard checked his horse and leaped to the ground. But he was too late to rescue his loved one from the danger that threatened.

The animal gave one terrific bound, then stood upon the very edge of the precipice, rearing, pawing the empty air furiously with its fore-feet, as though striving to retreat from a danger just realized.

One iron-shod hoof slipped. The frost-eaten rock cracked and crumbled beneath the strong pressure. A wild, almost human shriek of horror and fear broke from the lungs of the animal, as it felt itself overbalanced. And then, with a mighty leap, it sprang from the crumbling rock, far out over the canon's depths, dragging with it the dead horse, the wagon. One more scream—blood-curdling, intensely horrible—and then came a dull, crashing sound as the branches of the trees below gave way beneath their weight.

Upon the very verge of the abyss stood a tall, lithe figure, one arm supporting a drooping form, the other clasping a bright knife, flung back to restore his balance.

As the horse leaped to its feet, a man dashed out from behind the bowlder, dropping his still smoking rifle, drawing a keen knife from his belt. He reached the insensible maiden, just as the mad animal plunged into the abyss, and with a swift stroke severed the reins that bound her wrists as his left arm passed round her waist. But it seemed as though his bold adroitness would be all in vain.

The terrible strain upon the reins had dragged the maiden to the very escarpment, and, though he managed to check his rush just in time to avoid instantly following the horse, the stranger found that the lifeless weight upon his left arm was dragging him down—was surely destroying his balance, despite his utmost exertions. In vain he strove to leap back from the yawning abyss. An invisible power seemed restraining him—to be drawing him, slowly, surely down to death. With every muscle strained to the utmost tension—he could not take the single step that would carry him back to life, to safety. Instead, he was giving way. His tall form was slowly bowing, bending further over the dizzy depth, dragged down by the helpless body that hung so quietly upon his arm.

Without that, he could have easily saved himself. By simply straightening out his arm, all would be well. And perhaps she was dead. It might be a corpse that he held. She was so pale, so quiet. Not a muscle moved. Surely she could not be alive! Should he give his young life for a stranger—and that stranger one whom his sacrifice could not save? That these thoughts should have flashed across

the stranger's mind at such a moment is to stain upon his manhood. Life is sweet to him who had braved death a hundred times, who lived only for revenge. What had he, the death-hunter, to do with saving lives?

Yet he banished the momentary temptation, and clinching his teeth until it seemed as though they would be ground to powder, he continued his silent, horrible struggle.

Then he was suddenly drawn back from the abyss, and sunk breathless upon the ground. A dark figure seized the drooping maiden from his arm, quickly, almost rudely.

Frank Maynard had reached the stranger just in time to drag him back from death.

The stranger gripped his knife more firmly, and seemed about to leap upon Maynard, but then the fire died out of his eyes, as he heard the soft, caressing words that fell from the young man's lips. He saw that this man was her friend, and said, coldly:

"Take this—it is good whisky. If the lady is only in a faint, that is the best medicine. I will see what can be done for the other."

Maynard accepted the proffered flask, without so much as glancing up at the donor. He had no thoughts for other than the maiden who lay so white and cold upon his lap.

Vernon Campbell—for it was the young scout who had so opportunely appeared upon the scene—glided over to where Ada Dixon was lying. He stooped suddenly and tenderly wiped away the blood that slowly oozed from an ugly bruise upon her forehead. As though the touch of his hand had restored the spark of life, her eyes opened, resting wonderingly upon his face.

"You need not fear, lady," said Campbell, in a soft, reassuring tone. "You are safe—the danger is past."

"But Minnie—oh! I remember now!" and a shudder of horror agitated her form.

"She is safe—and with a friend of yours yonder."

"Then Frank—he was in time to save us?"

"Yes—but do not think of that now. See if you have escaped serious injury. 'Twas an ugly fall—if you have escaped with whole bones, 'twill be a miracle."

With these words Campbell offered his hand. Ada rose erect, though not without some little difficulty. She was stiff and sore, though there was to be nothing more serious than a few bruises.

"Minnie—Frank, she is not—not dead?" faltered Ada, as she reached Maynard's side.

"No—thank God! her heart beats—and see! she opens her eyes!" joyously cried the young man.

Vernon Campbell turned abruptly away, and reaching the bowlder that lay under an overhanging ledge where he had sought refuge from the *poudree*, he picked up his rifle, and first running the wiping-stick down the tube, carefully reloaded it. Then his eyes rested upon the trio who still knelt beside the abyss.

The still-fierce wind that poured through the narrow pass carried their words from him, so that he could not hear what they said. Yet their actions spoke plainly, and seemed to give him pain. A faint sigh parted his lips.

Sad memories of the dead past arose before him. Time rolled backward and he saw himself a child, careless, happy, little dreaming of the future before him. He saw his gentle mother, his bold, handsome father, his pretty, artless sister. Had she lived, she would have been about the age of these fair maidens. Then he would have had something to live for.

But then came the surprise—the massacre. He saw his loved ones fall beneath the hatchet—he saw their scalps torn from their heads. His eyes filled with blood.

But he had drunk deep of revenge—a Blackfoot warrior had fallen for every year of their lives.

At this thought the tall, athletic figure grew more erect, his blue eyes gleamed like polished steel, he half raised his rifle as though beholding an enemy before him.

It was only Frank and Ada, assisting Minnie toward the sheltering rock, and the wild fire gradually died out in the scout's eyes, as he silently made away.

"I haven't thanked you yet, sir," began Maynard, when he was rudely interrupted.

"Wait until you're asked—time enough then to speak of thanks. Never mind what I have done—forget it, as I shall. Only pray that the time may not come when you will curse me for having put out a hand to save you."

"What do you mean?—you speak strangely. I cannot understand you. Who and what are you?" asked Frank, wonderingly.

"You would not recognize my name were I to mention it. The Blackfeet know me; they call me Pecanne-puck-on-che-luk—the 'Man that drinks blood.' But, let that pass. You ask what I am. Your enemy, I suppose, since I act as guide to those who are tracking you to your death. But I will play my hand openly, since you are white, like myself. Listen now, and remember that I am giving you a chance for life. There—if you interrupt me, I will leave you in the dark, and the death of these women will be upon your head."

"Listen. There is a traitor in your camp. His name is Chris Camp. He is there only to betray you. For this he has led you miles and miles away from the right trail. You are now in the very heart of the Blackfoot country. Camp was placed among you by a man who calls himself Mat Mole, who commands the band of white men I guide. We laid the false trails that alarmed your people, and Camp interpreted them according to his instructions. Mole has eyes that look far ahead. He means to wait until failure is impossible; then he will strike. The Blackfeet will aid him. A strong party joined him only this day. They will attack your people soon."

"Why do you tell me this, if you are the enemy you say?"

"I don't know—because I am a fool, maybe. But it is true. The blow will come—the sooner you prepare for it, the better. But there—I wash my hands of the matter. You are warned—act as you please."

Speaking listlessly, Campbell shouldered his rifle, and facing the bitter storm, took a step toward the pass, when Maynard spoke hastily:

"Wait—you admit yourself an enemy—you threaten us with death. Then why should I let you go free to carry out your plans?"

Campbell turned his head, but made no effort to avoid the loaded revolver that covered his back. There was a cadence of contempt in his voice as he replied:

"I took you for a white man. You talk like a Blackfoot. If I have made such a mistake, I deserve the worst you can give me."

With these words, the young scout walked slowly away, disappeared in the pass, boldly facing the howling tempest that drove the mingled snow and sleet furiously before it.

The three friends crouched under the lee of the bowlder, but it afforded scanty protection from the storm. Maynard removed his coat and wrapped it around Minnie. He looked around for his horse, meaning to secure the saddle blanket for Ada, but the animal had disappeared. Unmurmuring he took off his knit blouse and wound it around the half-senseless maiden. Then he crouched down, bending over them as much as possible, seeking to intercept the cruel, cutting wind that almost pierced their very marrow.

That was a terrible, trying hour. It seemed as though all was lost—that they were doomed to perish. The sharp, stinging sensation of pain gradually became less poignant. Their limbs grew numb. A drowsiness stole upon them. The fierce howling of the tempest changed—it seemed to lull, to become soft and musical, like the gentle zephyrs of spring murmuring through the freshly-leaved tree-tops. A stupor stole over their brains. Unconscious of their danger, they yielded to it—to the stupor that precedes death by freezing.

A strange sound rose above the wailing of the winds. A shrill, piercing cry as of some human being in terror or intense bodily agony. Mingling with this was a dull, crashing jar.

The alarm roused Maynard, and he quickly lifted his head. He had been bending over the women, and as he rose, his temple came in violent contact with a sharp corner of the bowlder. A tiny stream of blood trickled down his face, as though a vein had been punctured.

Beyond a doubt this saved his life, for it dispelled the death stupor that was stealing away his senses. He cast a bewildered glance around, but could see nothing.

Then he realized the peril that threatened the women. He saw that they were nearly senseless—in that sleep which ended in death. He remembered the flask that the scout had handed him. He ran to the spot where it had been used, and found it. A musical gurgle met his ear. He knew that enough remained for his purpose.

He rudely shook both Minnie and Ada. They replied to him, but in vague, mutterings. He forced open their lips and poured the strong liquor down their throats. A fit of coughing ensued. The women were awakened. In eager words Frank revealed the danger that threatened, and finally succeeded in getting them upon their feet. With one upon each arm, he walked to and fro, unheeding their prayers that they might be allowed to rest—to sleep.

The *poudree* had spent its force. The heavens began to clear. The snow and sleet ceased to fall. Though the wind was still powerful, it seemed less cold and piercing. The little snow on the level, rocky floor began to melt.

"Look yonder!" abruptly cried Ada, at the end of a longer turn than usual. "A man—"

"An Indian—back—hide behind the rock," rapidly muttered Maynard, freeing his arms and drawing a revolver.

The head and shoulders of an Indian rose from behind a long bowlder. The black eyes were riveted upon the pale-faces, with a strange expression. Maynard thought it hatred, and leveled his weapon. For the third time that day it failed him. He had forgotten that the rain had rendered it useless. With a grating curse, he drew his knife and leaped forward.

The Indian lifted an open hand, and muttered a few words in a harsh, guttural language, unknown to Frank. The reason was now revealed. A heavy rock had fallen across the savage's body, pinning him to the ground.

"Help him, Frank—look at his face. He must be suffering fearfully," murmured Minnie, gliding forward.

"It is a Blackfoot—our enemy. You know what that strange man said. He must die!"

"It would be murder! God would never prosper us with such a cold-blooded crime upon our souls."

"And were we to free him—if he is not already fatally injured—what would be the result? He would shoot you down from ambush and scalp you, as a reward."

"He does not look like a bad man—see! he seems to understand our words—"

"Hark! what is that?"

The rattle of firearms—the shrill whoops of Indians, mingled with the hoarser shouts of white men; such were the thrilling sounds that came to the ears of the little party.

"Hoo! Blackfeet—pale-faces! You help me—I save you," suddenly uttered the savage, in imperfect English.

CHAPTER V.

AN OLD FEUD REVIVED.

Owing to the formation of the hills surrounding the valley in which the outlaws—for such in truth they may be termed—led by Mat Mole had pitched their camp, they felt the force of the *poudree* much less than the emigrants. Indeed, after the first furious blast, the men arose and watched the tornado passing far above their heads, sweeping the hill-crests clean, tearing huge trees up by the roots, twisting the sturdy trunks asunder, hurling them hither and yon like jackstraws. But the terrible hailstorm speedily drove them to cover again, while it lasted.

Mat Mole crouched beneath a jutting point of rock that securely sheltered him. His brow was clouded; something more than the storm was troubling him. The few audible words that dropped from his lips proved this.

"I was a fool not to think of that before—and now it may be too late—the chief will not be held back long, after what I told him. If I could only—and why not? Mat Mole does not look much like Gerald Manners—the eyes of love itself couldn't see the likeness! And I'll find no such eyes there—at least, eyes that sparkle for me. Then—I've not forgotten my old tricks. I can do it—I will do it!"

Mat Mole left his covert and crept toward the spot where his horse-equipage had been secured, and then, carrying a stout skin-pouch, he returned. Pouring a few drops of a thick fluid from an antelope horn bottle, he rubbed his face, neck and hands with it. His peculiar, sallow complexion was darkened almost to the hue of an Indian. Bits of quills, wrapped with cotton, were thrust into his nostrils. Mat Mole chuckled grimly as he peered into the bit of scratched mirror he held in his hand.

The quills had altered his voice, giving it a peculiar nasal twang, far from pleasant.

Mat Mole spoke a few words to Night-walker, and then gave his lieutenant, Van Tobin, certain directions, after which he picked up his rifle and facing the storm soon disappeared from the curious gaze of his men.

An hour later he was threading the pass through which the emigrant-train had toiled earlier in the day. Fortunately for him the *poudree* had spent its first force, or he could never have made headway against it.

The sound of excited voices came to his ears, and a minute later the confused wagon-train loomed up through the driving snow. He could distinguish human figures staggering to and fro, struggling to keep their feet against the furious windstorm.

"Hello, thar! you fellers!" shouted Mole, but the howling tempest drove the sound of his voice back.

The outlaw gained the hindmost wagon before any one paid him any attention. Even then no words were addressed him—only a brief stare of surprise.

The emigrants were just recovering from the shock. Their first thought was of the wildly-struggling, moaning, terrified animals. Twisted and entangled in the harness, the creatures were perfectly helpless. As though desirous of making a favorable impression, Mat Mole lent a hand, working as faithfully as though his own property was concerned. Only once he stopped to hiss a few words into the ear of Chris Camp. The traitor-guide stared in open-mouthed amazement, but a peculiar gesture checked the exclamation that trembled upon his tongue, and he bent once more to his work, though his bronzed cheek was a shade paler than before.

The animals were freed and led behind the wagons that still stood upright. Two of them had broken limbs, and were put out of their misery. Many of the others were lamed. The overturned wagon was pried up far enough for the mangled body of the unfortunate teamster to be dragged out. It was a sickening sight, that shapeless mass, so recently full of life, spirit and sensibility.

"My God!" suddenly cried John Warren, "where is the democrat? I thought they had reached the hill yonder, but I can see nothing of them!"

"There is McCarthy—just getting up—he can tell, I guess."

The agonized father ran to where the driver crouched, groaning with pain, and demanded his child. Poor Terence faltered out all he knew; he had been thrown to the ground, and had caught a glimpse of the spring wagon as it vanished up the pass. With these words the poor fellow fainted.

"And we have been dallying here—while my poor child was dashed to pieces! God in mere, protect her!"

He sprung to his horse, shouting for men to follow. Half a dozen obeyed him, among them Chris Camp. Mole glided to his side, and muttered a word in his ear; Camp started and his uplifted foot dropped from the stirrup. As Warren leaped into the saddle he noticed this action, and in a hoarse, unnatural tone shouted:

"You, too, Camp—we may need you."

Mole had turned aside. Camp hesitated for a moment, then leaped into the saddle and dashed after Warren. The outlaw chief uttered a fierce curse, his eyes flashing fire; but at that moment a firm hand was placed upon his shoulder.

"How did you come here—a stranger? But never mind—you acted like a man in lending us a hand in need, without waiting for an introduction."

"Mount in law says—put a enemy in difficulty whenever you kin, but help a friend out of one. That's my style, boss," quietly replied the disguised outlaw.

"Difficulty enough, heaven knows! I never witnessed a storm to equal this."

"Waal, yes, I reckon 'twas a pritty fair specimen. Talk about y'ur northers o' the sou'west—they can't shine in the little puffs o' wind we sometimes git up hyer in the hills."

"You look as though you had fared hardly, to"

"I did git a taste. Was ridin' long, keerless like, thinkin' to ketch up wi' your train afore the storm broke, when the wind ketched me an' rolled both me an' Patchie—my hoss, that is, boss—chuck over the edge o' the kenyon. I maniged to ketch holt o' a bush, an' saved my meat, but I reckon Patchie has gone straight to hoss-heaven, ef thar be sech a place."

"Catch up with us—but we have passed no canon lately," echoed the emigrant, Alfred Zimmerman.

"Tuck a short cut—kem through the upper pass," hastily explained the disguised outlaw.

"You were following us, then?" asked Zimmerman.

"Yes—but who's that feller—the big varmint, who's gawpin' at us 's though he'd never see'd a free trapper afore?" abruptly demanded Mole, his voice changing.

"That—Bob Harris, he calls himself. He joined us the other day, wounded; had some trouble with the Blackfeet, I believe. Why—do you know him?"

"Not by that name—though seems to me 't I've met him some'r's—or somebody a good deal like 'im. Told ye I was a free trapper. Two weeks back the red-skins smelt me out, and lit onto me hot an' heavy. They was led by a white feller. I put a lead-pill under his hide. Thort I'd made 'meat' o' him, but I mought 'a' bin mistaken. Didn't hev much time to take notes, but I'd swar 'at he was like enough to that feller yender, to be his twin-brother," quietly snuffed Mole.

"It may be—I have had my suspicions about him. He puts himself too forward. He finds fault with our guide—says that none but a fool or a traitor would have led us this far north. But hist—he is coming this way," and Zimmerman dropped his voice.

The mountaineer, Bob Harris, who had for several minutes been closely watching the outlaw, now advanced toward them, a peculiar light in his keen eye. A long rifle rested across his left arm; his right hand clasped the lock, as though to guard it from the driving particles of snow.

"Hullo, Zene Kalloch—kem hyar to settle up, hev ye?" he uttered, in a quiet, peculiar tone that thrilled the emigrant strangely, he knew not why.

"I reckon you're yelpin on the wrong trail, stranger," quietly responded Mole, and the nasal twang was now plainer than ever. "I was christened by the name o' Hurraw Jake—that is, ef I war christened a-tall, which I can't justly swar to, bein' as I was so young like. As fer settlin', I'm a free trapper—none o' your shif'less squatters. Wherever my trap is sot, thar I settles fer the time bein'."

"Hurraw Jake's good—so's free trapper—so's a-sheek. Funny what big mistakes a feller will make sometimes. Knowed a feller one time what made bisself b'lieve he war another man—fact! Most 's big a mistake es I made jes now. 'D 'a' swore you was a Blackfoot sub-chief!"

"Some folks hes queer ideas o' fun—I reckon you're one on 'em, stranger. But see! I'm a babby, mildes milk, when I ain't riled—but then ag'in I'm a pizen airtquake on wheels! 'Nough's enough, but too much's a plenty. Call me Green Burdock, or anything else you like, jest so ye don't go fer to insinivate as I'm sech a outdacious pizen riptyle es a Blackfoot! That riles me—it does so!" twanged Mat Mole, puffing out his cheeks ferociously.

"I said a chief—but I hedn't heerd your tongue work. A squaw'd be better. But let that go. You'd orter know me better than to try to bluff me on Jack high an' nary a pa'r, Zene Kalloch—fer I b'lieve you be him. Ef so, no man 'd dirty his han's wi' rubbin' you out in a stan-up fight. He'd do like I've swore to do—put his heel on your head an' squash all the pizen out o' it! Thar—you needn't finger your knife. I ked blow ye through afore ye ked draw it. Wait a bit. These fellers 'pear curious to know what's up. I reckon I'll spin 'em a bit of a yarn, jest to explain why I'm down on Zene Kalloch. You kin lis'en, too, Hurraw Jake—an' when I'm done, ef you kin still say 'at you're not my game, then I 'pologize any way you will—wi' knives or rifles, to suit," quietly said Bob Harris, as the emigrants began to gather around.

"Thar, old man—that'll do. You've tuck your own skelp. You needn't look no fuder. We'll jest play 'at I'm the feller you're lookin' fer. Which shall it be—hot lead or cold steel?"

"Then you giv' up 'at you're Zene Kalloch?"

"Give up nothin'! I'm Hurraw Jake, but I'll stan' n this feller's moceasins ontel you're satisfied."

"Don't be snatched, Blackfoot—you'll find the time quick enough a-comin'. Gentlemen, you want to know what's up, an' I don't blame ye. Felt the same way more'n once't myself. Lis'en. Won't keep ye long, 'ca'se this—gentleman—'pears in a hurry."

"Nigh twenty years ago I fust met Zene Kalloch, when we was both consid'able younger 'n we be now. I saved his life in a Injun scrimmage when, his skelp hed fairly started. I nussed him like a mother, ontel he was a man ag'in. I shared my traps wi' him, while he made pelts enough to git a outfit o' his own. We was like sworn brothers fer over two years. I told him all 'bout my folks to the settlements jest above St. Louey, ontel it 'peared like he was raaly one o' the fambly. I tuck him home wi' me, an' told 'em all he was my brother, an' they treated him as sech.

"He was jest in time fer my only sister's weddin'. She married a young settler, poor, like we was ourselves, but true-hearted an' honest. But thar—I don't reckon as you fellers feels much intrust in sech old matters. I won't try to tell everythin' that happened. Only you mustn't jedge altogether by this critter, es he is now.

"Wal—two years a'ter, Mary run away wi' the wass—tuck her little babby along. We hunted 'em

—me 'nd Jethro Cowles, her husban'—but 'twas no use. We lost the trail. For a year I hunted night an' day. Then I larnt he'd struck out fer the Blackfoot kentry. I follered, but missed him, though I heerd enough about him. He had turned prairie pirate, and hed bin choosed a sub-chief o' the Blackfeet, who called him Creepin' Panther.

"But I needn't tell ye o' all I did; o' the long, weary years I spent in s'archin' fer the sarpint. I never set my eyes on him but once. I was tuck by the Blackfeet then, an' one o' the braves recognized me. I hed sent a few o' his kin yelpin' long the last trail, an' they saved me to put me to the torments in style. I found Zene Kalloch in the camp then. He kem an' taunted me wi' what hed happined. He told me that he hed soon tired o' Mary, an' as she bothered him wi' her tears, he jest sold her to a half-breed Kanuck. He said she killed herself that same night. Es fer the kid, that he hed giv' to a Injun squaw, years ago.

"I stood this es long 's I could. Then I bu'st loose and struck the devil down wi' his own knife. I thort I'd killed him, an' made a break fer liberty. I jumped on a hoss, an' got away by the skin o' my teeth. It was a year or more afore I larnt Kalloch was still livin'. I've hunted him ever since—but never sot eyes on him until this day."

"A solemncholly story, but it don't prove me to be the feller you're lookin' fer," quietly observed the outlaw.

"Lift up the ha'r over y'ur left ear. Ef thar ain't the mark o' a skelpin'-knife, then you ain't Zene Kalloch," gritted Bob Harris, leaping forward and clutching the long black locks.

A simultaneous cry broke from the emigrants, as the telltale scar was revealed. But before one of their number could raise a hand, a long-bladed knife flashed in the air and was buried to the very hilt in the trapper's throat.

"That's my answer, Bob Harris—curse ye!" cried Mat Mole, as he freed his hair and darted away from the wagons, running along the pass swiftly as a mountain goat, leaping from side to side to avoid the bullets that were hastily sent after him.

The stricken mountaineer sunk to the ground, a frothy blood oozing from his lips as he gasped:

"God's curse rest on him forever! he's killed me, too—Mary—sister—I am—coming—com—ah!"

His head drooped. He was dead.

CHAPTER VI.

LEGEND OF THE MEDICINE SPRING.

THE five trappers stared in opened-mouthed amazement. For the moment they appeared incapable of either motion or speech. The fall of their comrade, the abrupt disappearance of the weird woman and her beautiful companion, held them spellbound. Yellowstone Jack was the one who first cast off the peculiar sensation of awe.

"Gone in swimmin', I reckon, boys; let's see the fun," he muttered, with a sickly smile, as he firmly advanced toward the mysterious boiling spring.

This action fully proved his courage more plainly than if he had charged a war-party of Blackfoot Indians single-handed. Yellowstone Jack was superstitious, like all of his class. He placed implicit faith in "medicine," good and bad. He believed in spirits, in spooks and hobgoblins, just as he did in powder, lead and steel. Yet he strode forward and quickly scaled the curious-looking parapet or "curb" that surrounded the spring.

The basin was nearly circular, probably twenty-five feet in diameter at the widest part. The water was almost perfectly transparent. Yellowstone Jack could look down into the beautiful ultramarine depth to the very bottom of the basin. The sides were ornamented with coral-like forms of a great variety of shades, from pure white to a bright chrome yellow, while the blue sky reflected in the transparent water gave an azure tint to the whole far surpassing art. Near the center of the basin, the water was in a state of ebullition, forming a miniature fountain, some three feet in height. Around this the water sparkled and effervesced something similar to, though in a lesser degree, the far-famed Soda Springs of Bitter Root river. A thin vapor hovered over this spot, and the water really had the appearance of boiling.

"What's the sign, Yellowstone?" called out Brindle Joe.

"You kin come up. They've puckacheed—but how? That gits me!"

"Spooks is spooks—an' so's medicine," quoth Hoosier, uncovering his head with an action that was almost reverence. "This is a big medicine spring—what good 'd it be 'thout its sperits? This 'ne 's got two, I reckon."

"They handled thar bow-arrers powerful like human critters though—I didn't know sperits needed to use sech things. An' yit—whar kin they 'a' gone? We kin see the sides an' the bottom, every inch. Thar ain't no hole 'cept that 'ne at the bottom whar the water bubbles up—an' it ain't big es a man's fist. A mortal critter kedn't go through that. They jumped in—they didn't git out ag'in, or we'd 'a' see'd 'em. I reckon you're right, Hoosier—we've see'd the sperits o' the Medicine Spring," gravely muttered Yellowstone Jack.

"Did ary one o' ye notice thar right paws?" suddenly put in Heely Hank. "This is the place whar old Black Harris kem to make medicine that time!"

The trappers interchanged quick glances. The lines upon their weather-beaten faces deepened. The expression of awe now appeared one of fear. Yellowstone Jack uttered, in a tone of forced rally:

"You're wuss'n a bedbug, Heely Hank—you'd wake a dyin' man up to ax ef he b'lieved in the devil! But thar's Mexy—we've clean forgot the pore feller!"

What meaning was hidden beneath the words of Gile Hank? A wild, fantastic legend. To explain the

effect of his words upon his comrades, I will give a brief sketch of it here.

Black Harris—so called from his dusky complexion—was a noted trapper and mountain-man, the comrade and friend of such noted men as Kit Carson, Jim Beckwith, La Bonte, Sublette, Greenwood, Bridger, Old Marblehead, Bill Williams, and scores of equally well-known heroes of the West. Like the majority of his class he was superstitious, beheved in "medicine," and one time, after an unusually long run of ill-fortune, he journeyed to the Enchanted Grounds to renew his "medicine." Near the Boiling Spring, a young white woman suddenly barred his path. She was dazzlingly beautiful—an "angel 'thout wings," as Harris was wont to declare. She told a pitiful tale of peril and privation. Her friends had been massacred by Indians. She was carried into captivity. A week before, she managed to escape, and had wandered through the mountains ever since, starving. Black Harris forgot his mission, and kindled a fire by which he roasted a ptarmigan. He sat at her feet and watched her eat. Then she began to sing—a low, weird melody, strangely sweet, soothing to the senses as the gentle murmur of the summer breeze eddying through the foliage of the mountain pines. The trapper's head slowly bowed. His soul seemed floating upon a sea of ecstatic bliss. The soft white hand fluttered over his head. The warm, slender fingers caressingly smoothed his long, tangled hair. His head sunk upon her lap. The song grew fainter, as though coming from a distance. A veil seemed settling over the trapper's brain. The hand glided down over his cheek, but it no longer felt so soft—it seemed to scratch—to sear his skin as it touched his throat. He felt something touch the knife at his belt. His eyes opened. An arm lay before his face. It was no longer white and delicate—it seemed to be black, covered with stiff bristles. He saw a bony leg—a cloven hoof. The truth flashed upon his mind, as he felt the knife slowly slip from its sheath.

He grasped the handle and tore it free. A horrible yell smote upon his ear, as he leaped erect. A frightful object confronted him.

"I knowed what it was in a minit," Black Harris was wont to say, "fer I'd see'd the picter o' the devil in a paper at Taos. I jest giv' a Kimanche yell an' lit onto the critter. We hed it red-hot, then. I reckon we fou't fer nigh a hour. I've fit Kimanche, Patchie, Rapaho and Blackfeet, but they wasn't a primin' to him! I reckon he'd 'a' bin too many fer the old man, only his foot caught in a hole, an' I downed him. I sent my butcher up to Green river twicet, an' then he sickened. He giv' a yell and then skooted over the mount'ns. See—you see this claw? I cut that off when I jerked my knife loose," the old sinner would add, holding up a crooked claw, that hung suspended around his neck by a piece of sinew.

One man—a stranger to Black Harris—swore that the claw had come from the foot of a carcajou. The irate trapper denied this, by driving his knife hilt deep in the man's breast. After that no one doubted the strange story, and it passed into tradition. Even at this day the legend may be heard around the camp-fires. I was told it by a trapper who devoutly believed in its truth; yet he was a keen-witted, shrewd and sensible man, in everything except his strong superstition.

Yellowstone Jack and his comrades had often heard this legend, and they knew that this was the very spring mentioned by Black Harris. The strange scenes they had witnessed—this beautiful woman and her marvelous disappearance had fully aroused their superstition.

They found Chavez, the Mexican, dead. The arrow had pierced his neck, dividing the spinal column. They lifted his body and bore it hastily away from that ill-favored spot.

A shrill, piercing, taunting laugh came to their ears, as they passed down the valley. Turning, they beheld a weird figure standing upon the mound they had crept up behind. It was that of the old hag—the witch of the Boiling Spring.

"This is the devil's den, boys—I can't breathe easy in it," huskily muttered Yellowstone Jack, hastening forward with his burden.

This belief seemed shared by his comrades, since their pace was accelerated, nor did one of them cast another look backward or pause for breath until they had passed an abrupt bend in the valley that shut off all view of the Springs.

Yellowstone Jack paused beside a large bowlder that stood upon one end; at its base was a small hollow. The men read aright his questioning look, and nodded assent. With their knives the hollow was deepened, the loose earth carefully placed in a pile. Then the body was deposited in the trench and a few leaves and twigs strewn over it. The dirt was pushed back and pressed down. Then the four men leaned heavily against the bowlder until it slowly toppled over, forever concealing the grave from human eyes.

"He deserved a big monniment ef human critter ever did," said Jack, brushing the perspiration from his brow. "He was a squar' man, clean through, ef he did hev greaser blood in him."

"Big es the rock is, 'twon't keep him down, I'm dub'us," gloomily muttered Brindle Joe. "A murdered man can't rest peace'bly long's the one whar rubs him out goes unpunished. But kin we take the skelp o' a spook? Not much!"

"I don't know—mebbe we was too quick in gittin' skeered—thar's a pesky lot o' humbug in this world. Mind, I don't say 't this is a humbug—but I do say 't I'm goin' to look inter it a little closter afore long. Chavez was too good a pard to let go so easy. But it's time we was gittin' back to quarters. Thar's a storm brewin'—I kin feel it in my bones!"

Half an hour later a glorious prospect was opened before the eyes of the trappers. They stood upon a

narrow ledge of rock that ran partially around the mountain. Before them, to the right and left, miles and miles of ground seemed spread at their feet; of hills and ridges, broken and wild, of valley and miniature plain, fertile and lovely, of deep, winding canons, gloomy and forbidding—all these were spread before them.

"Ge-thunder! look in Bad Wolf kenyon—see the white wagon-kivers—a emigrant-train!" exclaimed Brindle Joe, in astonishment.

"Skelps must be plenty wi' them sence they kerry 'em to sech a market as this. But look—the storm's comin' like fun! We must cache—in a hurry, too. Ef we're ketched hyar, it's good-by John!"

The trappers now began rapidly descending, leaping from ledge to ledge, alighting upon rocky crags that would scarce have afforded footing for a mountain goat, letting themselves down by bushes and creepers. They knew that this was no common storm, that a human being upon the mountain, unprovided with shelter, would stand but a faint chance of escaping with life.

"Hyar we be—an' none too soon, nuther!" gasped Jack, as he crept into a roomy cave half-way down the mountain side. "Jess lie'n! it's a game o' ten-pins wi' dornicks fer balls an' trees fer pins!"

Huge boulders thundered by. Great trunks of trees, splintered and cracked, were hurled past the cave-mouth. The icy-cold blast eddied through the den, chilling the men to the bone, until they were glad to huddle close together.

Yet, whenever the roaring of the elements would admit of audible speech, they discussed the sight they had just witnessed—that of the white-tilted wagon-train. Its presence in that remote region, so far from any recognized emigrant-trail, was indeed remarkable. They could not understand it, knowing as they did how implacable the Blackfeet were toward all pale-faces not actually adopted into their tribe. It seemed a miracle how the travelers had escaped massacre thus long.

"Mebbe it's one o' them 'splorin' outfits, though what they want hyar, I don't know. They say thar is sech things, but I can't see what fer—onless to keep the Indians stirred up, or to make game an' beaver skerce."

"Mought be a gov'ment-train to 'stablish a tradin' post," feebly suggested Brindle Joe.

"I didn't see no sojers—but it may be. Anyhow, they're white. S'posin' we giv' 'em a call? Mebbe we kin make a raise o' some powder an' whisky."

This clinched the matter. The decision was unanimous—they would visit the train as soon as the storm would permit.

The trappers did not wait long before starting forth, though the *pouderes* was still raging furiously. But it was freezing cold within the damp den, and they preferred risking the danger of being crushed by some of the many storm missiles; or being blown over the edge of some canon, to freezing. Exercise would prevent that.

The nature of the ground, broken, intersected by almost fathomless canons, forced them to make a wide detour. They reached the upper pass at last, sound in limb, when the storm was nearly over.

"Look yender!" suddenly cried Brindle Joe, pointing toward a point of rocks. "White men, by mighty!"

"An' red-skins, too! Thar's goin' to be a fust-class muss thar in jist three shakes! Look! thar it comes! Boys—they're whites—shall we let 'em be wiped out like that?"

Yellowstone Jack's comrades replied by gliding toward the spot where the rival races had come into collision. And the wild sounds of mortal strife arose even above the clamor of the elements.

CHAPTER VII.

A DASTARD SHOT.

FRANK MAYNARD was not a little surprised by this abrupt speech of the Indian, and for a moment made no reply.

"Blackfeet—pale-faces fightin' over dere. One git killed, oder come hyar. Plenty mad, den—eyes full blood. No stop to talk—strike fust—strike hard, too. Better we go hide, den. Dat why Pethonista he say—you help me—I help you," rapidly added the savage, with evident difficulty.

"Were I to set you free, we would only have one more enemy to deal with," hesitated Maynard.

"Help him if you can, Frank," interposed Minnie, eagerly. "Think how he must suffer beneath that rock!"

"He don't look like such a *very* bad Indian," murmured Ada Dixon, then shrinking back as the keen black eyes of the savage were turned upon her; there was a glow of admiration in their depths that chilled her blood.

"Pethonista he chief—he no got crooked tongue. What he say, he do. He no want you' scalps. He got plenty strong voice. All he need do is holler loud. Blackfoot hear—dey come—ax what chief want. He say—tek scalp pale-faces—you kill quick. Pethonista don't yell—don't say tek scalp—den he you' frien'. Dat my talk."

"Well, red-skin, you may be honest—and I more than half believe you are—but mind this. If I set you free from this hobble, and you try to play us false, I will kill you like a coyote—mind that."

"No need talk so—a chief don't lie," coldly responded the Blackfoot.

The sounds of firing still continued, though at longer intervals, and the faint yells could occasionally be heard. Evidently the struggle still continued.

"That remains to be seen, chief, though I must say that your tribe has not a remarkably savory reputation; but the devil is not as black as he's painted, and this may be a good deal owing to pre-

judice. However, I will set you free, if I can. The rock is a big one, and I am only one man, after all."

"Ada and I will help you, Frank," said Minnie, eagerly.

"Won't need much lift. Me fall in hole here, else rock kill me plenty quick. It hug down tight, dough," interposed Pethonista, bracing his hands against the rock.

Maynard secured a firm hold upon the smaller end of the oblong boulder, and then, exerting his utmost power, succeeded in raising the stone a few inches. Ada and Minnie lent their mite, and Pethonista, with an agile, snake-like movement, writhed his body out from a little hollow into which he had fortunately fallen. A single foot to either side and the massive boulder would have crushed him to death.

He did not speak, but bowed before the women, lightly pressing their hands to his bosom, as though vowing fealty to them. Then drawing the knife from his girdle, he held the handle toward Maynard.

"Let my white brother take this knife, and if he sees a single black spot in the Eagle's heart, let him strike hard and wipe it out."

Though he spoke in his own dialect, there could be no mistaking this action, and whatever of suspicion Maynard may have entertained was now banished.

"No, chief, keep your weapon. I don't believe you would turn it against the breasts of those who have befriended you. But see—the firing has stopped. The fight must be over. If I only knew how it had ended—" added Frank, anxiously.

"No—um go on ag'in. Dere rifle—some one git killed den, I reckon," coolly returned Pethonista, or the Eagle, as that title may be interpreted.

"Only for—" and Maynard looked wistfully upon Minnie and Ada, who had sought shelter from the cutting wind behind a point of rock. "I would go and see if I could not help the whites. They must be friends—perhaps some of our people searching for us."

"You lose scalp dere, sartin. Big warriors, Blackfeet—fight like debble—love white blood. Bes' we hide now, till kin git back to you' fr'en's. When dark comes, den me show you trail. Be snake now—dat bes'. Dat my talk."

"Then we had better hide until after dark?"

"Me t'ink dat bes' trail—save scalp, den, sure. Mebbe kin save it anyhow, but not sure. Pethonista chief, but he act now like common brave. Koutonipi lead Blackfeet now. But come—fight come dis way, quick—we bes' go hide, while kin," hurriedly added the Indian, after a moment's pause.

Maynard did not hesitate long. He also could tell that the combatants were gradually nearing the spot, one party evidently being forced back.

The Eagle appeared to have fully decided upon his course of action, for he did not hesitate a moment after the young man mutely admitted his trust, but glided rapidly away from the spot. Maynard followed close upon his heels, assisting Minnie and Ada over the inequalities, striving to lessen, if not dissipate, their natural fears.

After proceeding some two-score yards, their further progress was barred, the ledge abruptly ending. Pethonista chuckled grimly at the blank look that Maynard cast upon him, and stooping, he lightly dropped over the edge of the canon, alighting upon a ledge scarce one foot wide.

"You must be mad, chief," cried Maynard, angrily, in answer to the Blackfoot, who motioned him to pass the women down to him. "You would both fall and be dashed to pieces. No, you must find some better trail than that, or else we stay here to face whatever may come."

Pethonista made an impatient gesture, then dropped from his perch to another some six feet below. Drawing himself up again by the strength of his arms, he uttered:

"Dat way, I mean. You give squaw—I put her down dere. Den you come—we go, too. All right den—plenty room—wide trail. Better dan wait fo' Blackfeet come scalp."

"He is right, Frank," interposed Ada. "If we trust him at all, why not entirely? I do not believe he means treachery. I will go first—help me."

The Eagle gave an emphatic grunt of approval, and raised his arms. Maynard yielded, and lowered Ada over the escarpment. Pethonista held her lightly for a moment, then dropped her to the second ledge.

"I was right—there is a good, safe path here," the brave girl cried, the next moment.

Thus reassured, Minnie was quickly placed beside her cousin, and Maynard followed. Pethonista dropped to the ledge, and then led the way.

The scene was peculiar. The little party, with their guide, were gliding along the perpendicular face of the canon, several yards below its top. The abyss yawned below them, dark and gloomy. The bushy tops of trees swayed to and fro below them in the eddying wind, though scarce a breath touched the fugitives. The wall above shielded them.

After following this precarious trail for half an hour, Pethonista paused and said that they might now wait until the shades of night should settle down upon the earth, under cover of which they could gain the wagon-train undiscovered by the Blackfeet. Though the trio were so anxious to regain their friends, who would be dreading the worst from their long absence, they could not object to the Eagle's reasoning, and composed themselves to wait.

The sort of a niche in which they paused was well sheltered, even if the storm had not entirely ceased. The air rapidly grew warmer, the sky cleared and the sun shone brightly as it neared the horizon.

While waiting, Pethonista, who appeared to be in unusually good-humor, and to feel kindly toward those who had assisted him, explained to Frank the

reason why he, though a chief of the Siksikaga Blackfeet, was forced to use so much caution, instead of openly leading them to their friends.

A Blackfoot brave had brought a white scalp to his village, and said that he knew where more pale-faces were hidden, trapping. A war-party was immediately made up, and, guided by the brave, started a once to punish the interlopers. They met Pethonista, who had been out hunting alone, and he resolved to join them, though knowing that, in accordance with the rules of the tribe, he must serve as a common brave, subject to the orders of Koutonipi, a sub-chief, really far below him in rank. On the morning of the storm, Koutonipi sent out scouts to learn whether the trappers had taken the alarm and fled at the death of their comrade, while the main body remained behind to await the report. Pethonista wandered away from them, when the storm caught them. He heard the rifle-shot and struggle upon the edge of the canon, and crept forward, hoping to gain a scalp. But a loosened boulder gave way and crushed him to the ground.

"Me wanted you' scalp den," the Eagle confessed, with refreshing frankness, "but you help me. Now me fight fo' you. You my brudder—me like you heap! Koutonipi no take scalp, while Eagle live. But bes' wait—den slip by in dark. Den no trouble."

As the sun sunk to rest, the party resumed their way. Pethonista said that a few hundred yards more would carry them to a point where they could easily regain the level ground, and then a couple of hours would see them safely to the train.

The girls, though stiff and sore from the bruises they had received during their fearful ride, as well as when they were cast from the overturned "democrat," bore up nobly under the fatigue, for they thought the worst was past—that all danger was left behind them. Little did they dream of what the future had in store!

Pethonista suddenly paused and crouched low down, throwing forward his rifle. A suspicious sound—like the sharp *click-click* of a rifle being cocked—met his ear. But he was too late.

A loud report—a blinding sheet of flame. A shrill cry of agony followed. Frank Maynard flung up his hands, and, tottering for a moment, fell backward over the escarpment, down—down!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WITCH OF THE LOILING SPRING.

WHEN the reader is informed that the story told by the unfortunate Lob Harris was true in every particular, the emotions of the disguised outlaw, Mat Mole, can readily be imagined. Yet, naturally brave, despite his villainy, he did not suffer a chance to escape him, even while expressing pantonistic ridicule of the trapper's words. He knew that both could not live through that interview—that the death of at least one must be the finale. He had visited the train to make arrangements with Chris Camp for the final blow. The traitor-guide was gone, so that object was a failure. Thus he was ready when the crisis came, and plunged his knife to the hilt just over the trapper's collar bone. Then, with a rapid bound, he passed the two emigrants who stood between him and the pass, and was beyond arm's length before a hand could be interposed.

Leaping swiftly from side to side with the skill and wonderful agility that had gained him a name even among the athletic Blackfeet, he darted down the pass. Several bullets, hastily discharged, with little or no attempt at aim, whistled harmlessly past. And a taunting cry broke from his lips, so assured was he of ultimate escape, knowing as he did that none but draught mules remained with the train, the saddle-horses having been ridden by the emigrants setting forth in quest of the runaways.

He continued his flight with a swiftness the best Indian runner might have envied, covering the ground with long, swinging strides closely resembling those of a hotly-hunted moose, until the division of the pass was gained. Here, for the first time, he glanced back. No one was in sight. He placed one ear to the ground, but could distinguish no sound above the howling winds.

"Sensible—they haven't chased me!" he muttered, with a satisfied chuckle. "Guess I astonished them a little by my style of shaking moccasins. Then I did kill that varmint! Else he would have followed me, even though my trail led to Hades itself! Ugh! how my blood chilled when I first met those eyes! And I had believed him wiped out, years since. Well, he's taken up the long trail at last—I wish the fiend joy of his bargain! Ha! I forgot Warren—what if I should meet them coming back? What story could I tell them? If I could only tell which pass they took."

Mat Mole closely inspected the rocky ground, but found nothing to guide him with certainty. The snow had been swept clear by the wind, the hail-stones had nearly all melted. True, he found places where hoofs had scratched the rocky ground, but these were in both divisions alike.

"Well, I will risk this one," he finally decided, fearing to delay longer. "It is the shortest, and even if I took it, I may reach open ground before they come back."

Had he chosen the upper pass, Mat Mole would have come in contact with Maynard, Pethonista and the two women. As it was he chose the lower, thus following direct upon the trail of John Warren and his party.

"Curse that Chris Camp! why did he go off when I told him—but I could not have told what I wanted, anyhow, so after all don't matter. Yet 'twas a glorious day's work! Best I ever did—since now I know that infernal bound is dead. 'Twasn't for nothing my dreaming of him so often of late—but I'll never again wake up with the feeling of his

Iron fingers throttling me. Ugh! what fools men are sometimes. Just see what bother and trouble that bit of nonsense has made me. Yet what was she, after all? A dainty bit of flesh and blood, no more. If she had been free I don't suppose I'd have given her a second thought—but I wanted to spoil that good-natured fool's happiness. Yet he must have thought a heap of her—to go crazy over it! But there—confound it all! how the subject does run in my brain—I can't drive it away. Because of that big brute, Harris, I suppose."

The outlaw seemed desirous of forgetting the matter, and muttered to himself of a dozen different things, but the memory could not be entirely banished, curse it as he might. Was it a sentiment—a shadow cast upon his spirit by what the future had in store?

As he reached the mouth of the pass, Mat Mole heard the click of a hoof upon rocks, and glancing hastily to the left, saw a number of horsemen riding toward him, though still at a considerable distance. He recognized the party of emigrants, and crouching low down, ran swiftly away, taking a ledge that he believed would carry him far beyond reach of the mounted men, even if he should be discovered. But a few moments showed him that the ledge abruptly ended! Seemingly a portion of the rock had been broken off during the storm by a howler falling from the heights above.

The hoof-strokes sounded louder, and served to sharpen his wits. To retreat would be to court a collision that would be awkward, to say the least. Stooping, he glanced over the ledge. A bright light filled his eyes. Clutching a point of rock, he quickly lowered himself over the edge. Clinging thus for a moment, he dropped lightly, and then cautiously stole along a narrow trail until hidden round a slight bend.

"If they feel like following me now, all right. My men will have a few less to deal with to-night," chuckled the bandit, looking to the caps of his revolvers.

But Mole had deceived himself. The horsemen had not observed him, and rode on, the sound of their animals' hoofs rapidly dying away in the distance. Yet Mole did not retrace his steps. He crouched there upon the rocks, shielded upon both sides by jutting points over which he could peer if necessary. He seemed deep buried in thought, and the minutes gradually grew into hours unheeded.

Then the outlaw awoke to a sense of his surroundings. A suspicious sound had met his ear. He glanced quickly over the point of rock, and a wild glitter filled his eyes. If ever human being was possessed of the devil, Mat Mole was that man then. A horrible expression distorted his face; hatred, revenge, venomous delight—all gathered into one writhing, working mask.

Quick as thought he lifted his rifle and fired. A horrible shriek followed—then a dull, crashing sound as a dark body plunged swiftly down the depth.

Crouching down below the rock, the outlaw uttered a shrill, peculiar whoop—the same that had so startled the Night-walker, earlier in the day—the war-whoop of Creeping Panther, the white sub-chief of the Blackfeet.

"It's the Eagle. I don't think he'll dare dispute my will, after what has passed between us, but if he does—well, I will lose an Indian brother, that's all," muttered Mat Mole, as he drew a revolver and stood erect, though all but his head was concealed behind the rock.

"You seem surprised to meet me here, brother," the outlaw said, using the Siksikaga dialect, which is but little different from that of the other two divisions of the Blackfoot tribe.

"There is a cloud between us," gloomily replied the chief. "You have killed a brave who was under my protection. The pledge of a Blackfoot chief is not to be broken like that of a pale-face squaw."

"I have taken the life of an enemy—of one who has long followed my trail with blood in his eyes. Would you have me sit still and let him tear off my scalp? Is that the advice you give a brother?"

Pethonista hesitated, and cast a glance back to where Minnie and Ada crouched sobbing upon the ledge, tight locked in each other's arms. He seemed in a quandary.

There is one especially sacred bond among the Blackfeet. It is where one brave declares another his brother by a peculiar ceremony. He fills his mouth with pure water, winds his arms around the chosen one's neck, and while kissing him, ejects the liquid into the other's mouth. If swallowed, the pledge is ratified, and the chosen brother has entire control over the other's future life. His will is law, in small as well as great matters. An Indian would suffer a thousand deaths rather than disgrace himself and family by proving false to his pledge.*

Mat Mole had once saved the Eagle's life, nearly losing his own in the attempt, and the grateful savage had proclaimed Creeping Panther his brother before the entire tribe. Upon this pledge Mole now depended.

He had fired upon the impulse of the moment, directly upon recognizing Frank Maynard, whom he regarded as a successful rival. Knowing that Pethonista was an inveterate enemy to all pale-faces outside of his own tribe, he naturally supposed the chief had captured them, and as an Indian is bound to defend with his life, if need be, the captive who has yielded to his prowess, Mat Mole feared to await recognition, lest his enemy should escape him, through the Eagle's sense of honor.

Pethonista silently bowed his head at this hint of the bond between them, and Mole saw that his words had not been in vain.

*A fact. An instance was known as late as the spring of '00.

"Let my brother, the Eagle of the great Blackfeet, listen," continued the outlaw, resolved to strike while the iron was hot. "A hunter finds him a fine, fat deer. He sets out upon its trail and never pauses for rest or food or drink, but keeps on and on until the swift deer tires and grows weak, until its steps are short and feeble and it is ready to lie down and die. Another hunter comes by, and puts out his hand and catches the deer that is too tired to escape him, just as the first hunter comes up. Now will my brother tell me which one of the hunters has the best claim upon the game?" abruptly concluded Mat Mole.

"The long trailer," promptly responded Pethonista.

"Good! the eyes of the Eagle are clear—they can read the truth through the deepest cloud. Brother, I am the long trailer—you are the hunter who puts out his hand to stop the game I had run down. For six moons I have been on the trail of this deer; which is best—your claim or mine?"

Pethonista cast a quick glance back upon the sobbing, terrified maidens, and then keenly gazed into the outlaw's eyes. His eyes were boldly met. Mole was playing for a high stake, and had summoned all his wits.

"The Eagle is right. The brown-haired squaw is the game I have trailed so long and far. She belongs to me. Whose right is better than mine? If my brother started the game first, let him speak, and I will give way to him. If not, then he must not interfere, unless he has forgotten that we are brothers."

"A chief never forgets," coldly replied Pethonista. "The light-haired squaw is my brother's. But he does not speak of the other. Does he claim her, as well?"

"No—I care not for her, though she is fair to look upon. She would fill the lodge of a Blackfoot chief well."

"A Blackfoot chief does not hunt a squaw among the enemies of his people," coldly returned Pethonista.

Mat Mole laughed. He cared little for the Eagle's ill-humor, provided that worthy did not interfere further. Bold as he was, he knew that the chief would be more than his match, if they ever came into collision.

"Well, chief, 'tis a bargain, then. I will take my captive—you can do what you like with the other," said Mat Mole, gliding round the point of rocks, and approaching the cowering girls. "Come," he added, roughly, while Pethonista gloomily watched them, "enough of this nonsense. What are you whining about? Because that fool fell over the rock? Bah! there are plenty more men in the world—and better men, too, by long odds. But see—'tis getting dark, and there is a long trail before us. Come—or must I help you?"

"Who are you—what do you want?" faltered Minnie.

"I'm your master at present—until I take you to my master. What I want is that you follow me, without any more whining. Do you want to stay here all night?"

"No—no! take us to our friends, and we will bless—"

"That's just what I mean to do. Your friends are waiting for us, anxious enough, no doubt. Come!"

"He is lying, Minnie—he is trying to deceive us!" cried Ada. "He is no friend—he shot poor Frank."

"Your tongue is too free, girl; but never mind. The chief will bridge it. He means to make you his squaw—"

"Creeping Panther lies!" fiercely interrupted Pethonista.

"I only wanted to close her mouth, chief," said Mole, but the devilish glitter in his eyes belied the humble words. "See here," he added, turning to Minnie, impatiently, "take your choice. Either walk with me quietly, or else I will carry you in my arms, though upon such a narrow trail we will be more apt to find the bottom of the canon together than to reach level ground. But I will wait no longer. Will you walk, or shall I—"

"I will walk. If you mean us evil, may God punish you as you deserve," quietly replied Minnie, arising.

"Thanks for your good wishes! Chief, will you come?"

Pethonista simply bowed, and then extended his hand to aid Ada round the point. She gazed at him keenly for a moment, then accepted the proffered assistance. Something told her this man could be trusted.

Mole led the way, back over the route he had come, followed by Minnie, behind whom came Pethonista and Ada. In a few minutes the place where Mole had descended was reached, and climbing up first, he assisted the others. Then he turned to the Eagle, and said:

"Will the Eagle walk with his brother, or does his trail lie in another direction? He would be glad to have the Siksikaga chief show us how to strike the pale-faces to-night, though Night-walker is with us."

"Pethonista is not needed where Neepaughweese fights; he will follow his own trail," was the cold reply.

Mat Mole smiled grimly. He was right well content that the matter should end thus. He began to look upon the chief as an incumbrance instead of an ally.

"Well, chief, as you please. I will take my squaw and go—you can work your pleasure with the other. Remember that she has friends near, who are looking for her, though they will not be able to trouble us long. We strike them this night, and if you would like to win a scalp or two, you can come and show my braves how to fight."

Then he drew Minnie's hand through his own and strode away, stilling her pleadings not to be separated from Ada, with bitter curses and significant threats

that caused her blood to run cold. Little did she suspect who this rough man really was—least of all recognize in him the polished Gerald Manners, who, a few months previously, had made ardent love to her, who had seemed fairly heart-broken when she refused his proffered hand.

"Where are you taking me—what have I done, that you should treat me so cruelly?" tremblingly asked the maiden.

"I'm taking you where you'll be taken good care of," responded Mat Mole, nasally. "Where you'll be treated like a lady. As to what you've done, I reckon the boss 'll tell you. My idee is that you've jilted him some time or another, and he takes this way to get even. I don't know what else he followed you clear from the States for," coolly responded Mole, with a covert glance.

"There is—there must be some mistake. I have wronged nobody—you must have been sent after—"

"Your name is Minnie—daughter of old John Warren?"

"Yes, but—"

"Nary mistake, then. You're the bird the boss wants."

"Who is this man—your master, then?"

"Well, you must know it anyhow, before long, so I guess there's no harm in saying it's Gerald Manners."

"Impossible! you are trying to deceive me—Gerald Manners is a gentleman," cried Minnie, impulsively.

"Yes, I reckon he is—after a way. Anyhow, he means to treat you right. The moment you say you'll marry him, you will be free as air to go where you will."

"I cannot believe that he would stoop to such wickedness—such meanness. But if he should, it would avail him little. Is this the way to win the love of a woman—by—"

"There—your voice is sweet and musical, lady, but you raise it too loud for our safety. These rocks have ears—these hills are full of enemies both to you and me—of cruel, bloodthirsty Indians, who would glory in tearing off that pretty head of hair—or in treating you even worse. We have had talk enough for a time—please let your tongue rest. I should hate to gag a lady, but needs must when the devil drives."

The outlaw abruptly paused and glared keenly around. Was it fancy, or had he indeed heard a low chuckle at his last words? He could see nothing to confirm the suspicion—all was still save the morning wind. And with a curse he thrust back the half-drawn revolver, and strode rapidly forward, holding Minnie firmly by the arm.

She also was silent. Something in the bandit's tone told her that it would be dangerous to cross his will now. Besides, the terrible trials that she had that day undergone, had completely broken down her spirit, and she almost unconsciously dragged her heavy feet along.

Mat Mole seemed in a hurry to reach his camp. Better for him had he used more caution, if he had cast an occasional glance behind him. Though 'twould have taken a keen eye to detect the dark figure that dogged their steps. Silently as a shadow the phantom-like form followed them, now almost within arm's length, now lingering behind, almost fading away as it seemed.

But after dogging them thus for nearly two miles, through the hills, the shadow stealthily drew nearer, and then, with a shrill, eldritch scream, leaped forward, and dealt the startled outlaw a fearful blow upon his head, felling him like a log. The heavy club was again lifted, and the fiery eyes glared down upon the fallen man, like those of a maddened beast. The outlaw did not move. The blow appeared to have been fatal. And then the threatening club sunk, as the strange being withdrew its foot from the lifeless form, turning to where Minnie had sunk to the ground in a swoon on hearing that horrible, unearthly cry.

The blood-stained club was lifted threateningly as though about to dash itself upon the maiden's defenseless head, but then, with a low, indescribable laugh, the shadow caught Minnie up and glided away. And the moon momentarily shone out, revealing the wild figure of the Witch of the Boiling Springs!

CHAPTER IX.

THE CRAWL OF THE SERPENTS.

PETHONISTA quickly grasped Ada by the arm, as she sprung forward to join Minnie, when Mat Mole half-dragged, half-carried her away through the darkness. Her struggles for freedom were in vain—firmly, though gently, the Eagle held her captive. Then, with a warning cry, the maiden sank a lifeless weight upon the chief's arm.

The Blackfoot found himself in a dilemma—one anything but pleasant. He gently lowered Ada to the ground, and then, while staring at her with puzzled eyes, the Eagle diligently scratched his head.

A Blackfoot squaw is not civilized enough to know how to faint. Even if she did understand the fashionable art, it's odd that the first trial would satisfy her—her lord and master would undoubtedly apply the lodge-pole remedy—rude, but very effective. Pethonista would have tried something of the kind with a squaw of his own people, but he was almost afraid to touch this package of delicate white clay, and it was with positive joy that he heard Ada utter a faint moan, at the same time lifting her head.

"Squaw needn't be 'fraid," Pethonista hastened to assure the maiden. "Creeping Panther he gone 'way—Eagle take the squaw to frien's, plenty quick."

"Take me to her—to Minnie—do not separate us—and I will thank you," brokenly pleaded Ada.

"No. Eagle he big fool do dat. You hear he say

dat Night-walker wid him? Night-walker big brave—tek plenty scalps—fight like debble. But he bad eye for white squaw. He see you—dat makes his eye full of fire. He say—you go my lodge—you be squaw chief. You say no—fo' Night-walker not look good; got only one eye, no nose. Then he cuss—say *must*. Den Eagle say no—'cause you my brudder now, since you tell white brave lift rock 'way. —Night-walker he say *yes*. Den we fight, mebbe. He git killed, den—*sure*. Dat make Eagle outlaw—no more be Blackfoot chief. Night-walker's braves dey tek bot' squaw an' chief—tie 'em to tree—den we burn. Dat why Eagle he say no—won't tek you after Creeping Panther."

"Then let me go by myself. If you are really grateful for me saving your life, I pray you give me freedom—let me go back to my friends!"

"Where frien's?" quickly demanded Pethonista.

"I don't know—but I will find them. Only let me go—you frighten me!" murmured Ada, shrinking back.

"Lis'n. Eagle frien'—no en'my—no want to skeer squaw. He chief—no got crooked tongue. What he say, dat straight. Tell me where you los' frien's. Pethonista take you dere. He swear it by Great Spirit—what you call God," earnestly replied the Blackfoot.

There was something in the young chief's tone that told Ada he was not seeking to deceive her, and after a moment's hesitation she described, as nearly as she was able, the pass through which the trail led. The chief's face brightened, for he easily recognized the description.

"All right now—me know dat place—dey stop at spring, where water plenty fo' hosses. We find 'um frien's dere. Den you know dat Eagle no lie—dat him heart open to pale squaw."

"Can you—will you take me to them?" eagerly cried Ada. "And right away—I am strong now—I can walk very far and fast. And they can save Minnie—on horseback they can overtake that dark man!"

"Yeh—me tek you. Don't know 'bout ketchin' Creeping Panther—he good scout—kin hide like snake. Den mebbe you' frien's have plenty work—han's full. You hear him say—strike pale-faces to-night? Dat mean Blackfoot want scalp. Tek 'em, too—dey fight like debble, when see blood in dere eyes. Tek yours, too—don't know squaw from brave, when mad. Eagle like you *heap*—he you' frien'. He t'ink you bes' hide in rocks till 'nudder day. Den, if Blackfoot don't tek all scalp, you kin go to frien's. If do—den Eagle he t'ink some odder way save you."

"No—take me to them, as you promised. If they are fated to be murdered, why should I live? I have no other friends—I must share their fate."

"Eagle no lie—he do what you tell. But he sorry heap sorry. Squaw no good when dead," slowly said the chief, betraying a degree of emotion seldom exhibited by a brave.

"Eagle know where Night-walker stop—know trail he take to git to pale-faces. Den bes' we tek nudder trail. If meet Injun, den Eagle have to say you his captive, or dey kill squaw, plenty quick, 'cause dey not my braves. Don't like Eagle much—Night-walker's braves," tersely added Pethonista, as he took Ada's hand and left the spot in a direction nearly opposite to that taken by Mat Mole and Minnie.

The trail they were forced to follow was long and tortuous, rough and almost impassable for a woman, more especially when so nearly exhausted as Ada. Despite her feverish anxiety to reach the train that men might be at once sent in pursuit of Minnie's abductor, she was forced frequently to pause to take breath. Nothing but an unusually strong will kept her from breaking down entirely, though the Eagle lent her all the assistance in his power, short of carrying her in his arms.

Since sunset, the sky had suddenly become overcast with clouds, broken and fast-scudding, yet dense enough to almost entirely shut out the light of moon and stars. Thus groping through darkness, despite his thorough knowledge of the ground, Pethonista was forced to advance cautiously, lest a misstep should precipitate him into one of the many yawning "man-traps" that lay upon either hand. So it was that they did not reach level—comparatively—ground again until nearly midnight.

A few minutes afterward, Pethonista suddenly paused, with a contemptuous grunt, as he uttered:

"See—dere you' frien's—by spring. Big fools, dough! T'ink Blackfoot need fire to see how lift scalp."

Ada gave a gasp of joy. Before them—though still nearly a mile distant—she could just distinguish the faint gleam of a camp-fire. Beyond a doubt it was, as the chief said, the camp of her friends. No Indian would have set up such a beacon in an enemy's country.

"Thank God! at last! Oh, hasten—hasten! I must tell them about poor Minnie."

"Too fast—too slow; both *bad*. Don't know—mebbe Injun out dere hunting for scalps. Plenty room—dark hide 'em. We run, dey hear steps,—go slow—creep like snake, den no hear, no see—squaw git through all right. Dat my talk," interrupted Pethonista.

"But you—I am afraid to go alone now, since you think there are Indians there," faltered Ada.

"No go 'lone—Eagle go, too. Not inside camp—dat bad, 'cause pale-face Eagle's en'my, too. But squaw mus'n't be scare'. Mus' be quick, cunning, all same like snake. Mebbe no Injun—mebbe not git here yet. Mus' act like dey *was*, dough; sure not git fooled, den."

Though trembling with fear and exhaustion, Ada saw the sense of Pethonista's reasoning, and endeavored to conquer her weakness. Crouching down like a panther lying in wait for its prey, Pethonista lis-

tened intently. No suspicious sound broke the air. Everything seemed peaceful and quiet. Yet this only served to confirm the chief's suspicions that his brethren were even then creeping upon the doomed train. What had silenced the querulous yelping of coyotes that nightly surround a camp, rendering night hideous with their howling, snapping cries? A score of coyotes will surround a wounded buffalo, in diabolical concert. But, let a huge gray or black wolf appear, and they draw off, dumbly sitting upon their haunches, patiently waiting for the remnants of the feast. More than once Pethonista had known them to show the same deference to the two-legged wolves, and he believed 'twas the case now.

With an uneasy glance at Ada's light-colored dress, he crept noiselessly on toward the faint twinkling point of light. The maiden imitated his example as closely as possible.

They had crossed nearly two-thirds of the distance without seeing or hearing anything beyond the common, when suddenly the full moon sailed from beneath a dense cloud, pouring a flood of silver light over the scene.

A cry of surprise rose to Ada's lips, but quick as thought the Eagle's broad palm rested upon them and forcibly held her close to the ground.

The level before and upon both sides of them was dotted with scores of dark, oblong figures. Not one moved, not one gave the slightest indication of being other than inanimate objects, but Pethonista well knew that they were Blackfoot warriors, thirsting for blood; that they had been stealing up to the camp, when the flood of moonlight caused them to lie motionless and still as stones.

The wagons were drawn up into a corral-like shape, seemingly close against the wall of rock. The only evidence of life was in that tiny fire, built close outside the row of vehicles.

Then the tableau changed like magic. A single jet of flame issued from the corral—a loud, clear voice uttered a defiant shout that mingled strangely with the shrill, unearthly scream as one of the dark figures leaped convulsively into the air, then falling, tore and bit the hard ground in its death-agony.

As though this was the signal for which they were awaiting, the crawling serpents changed to bounding cougars as they sprung forward to the attack, yelling, screeching, shouting—the mingled war-cries of both red and white savages. Again that clear shout from the corral—and the dark line seemed fairly griled with fire, as twenty rifles vomited forth their contents, hurling death and confusion into the oncoming mass of demons.

The savages hesitated—faltered—their yells of expectant triumph changed to cries of surprise. A cheer went up from the corral. The emigrants believed the victory won. That sound turned the scale. The savages pressed madly forward. Blood was in their eyes. They thought no longer of themselves—paid no heed to the storm of revolver bullets that saluted them—dashed on with deep, snarling cries, determined to crush the hated invaders who had stricken them such a deadly blow.

Pethonista leaped erect at the first shot, his chest dilating, his eyes glowing, every muscle working, his magnificent form all in a tingle as the hatchet flashed from his girdle. The wild, thrilling war-cry that had caused many a bold foeman's heart to beat quicker broke from his lips, and he seemed about to join in the charge.

But a little hand clutched his ankle—a trembling voice besought his protection. And as he looked down and saw the pale, terrified countenance, the fire gradually died out of his face. He remembered his pledge. Fierce warrior though he was, he could not forget that.

He glanced toward the corral. The Indians and their white-skinned allies had just reached it. And then the moon sailed beneath another cloud; all below was cast into a dense gloom. Yet the foemen, though standing so close to each other, held their blows for a moment. They gazed upward in mute amazement.

A shrill, eldritch peal of laughter came to their ears. Standing upon the very pinnacle of the hill, was a weird figure—a smaller form crouching at her feet, with arms outstretched toward the wagon-train. Again that maniacal peal, and a few shrill words came down from the dizzy height; then the moon hid itself.

And the struggle was renewed.

Pethonista caught Ada up in his arms and ran swiftly across the point of rocks. Passing round this, he deposited her upon the ground, beneath an overhanging rock, bidding her keep perfectly still until he returned. Then he sounded his war-cry and hastened to the fray, as a lover hastens to his bridal.

Ada covered eyes and ears, seeking to drown the devilish sounds, but in vain. Then, worn out, terror-stricken, she must have swooned. Whether minutes or hours had elapsed, she never knew, when rude hands seized her.

A hideous face—burning eyes and gloating look; this much she saw—and then felt herself clasped to a broad breast and borne swiftly on through the night.

CHAPTER X.

THE LOST TRAIN.

A PARTY of horsemen, whites, about a dozen in number, riding along at a slow pace, over a rocky, difficult trail; nearly twice as many Indians, in all the savage glory of war-paint and feathers, crouching behind a pile of bowlders beside the winding trail; some distance off, in a ravine where they were scarcely hidden from the white men's sight, were a number of mustangs.

The whites abruptly drew rein. Beyond a doubt they suspected some trap, or had observed something suspicious. The Indians, unable to restrain their hatred, opened fire, though at such a distance

as to render their arrows nearly useless, though one white man fell, bullet-pierced.

The Indians charged boldly—their evident hope was to alarm the pale-faces into seeking safety in flight, when the nimble-footed braves could easily pick them off in detail, bothered as they would be with their horses. But, though well enough intended, the plan failed, since the pale-faces, instead of giving way in confusion, leaped from their animals and sought cover behind the nearest bowlders, then marked down the savages as rapidly as a bead could be drawn upon any of the rapidly-flitting, dusky bodies.

Such was the sight witnessed by Yellowstone Jack and his comrades upon the afternoon of that eventful June day. They did not hesitate long. One of the parties, besides being much the more numerous, was their hereditary enemy, the Blackfoot Indians.

"I reckon we'd better make it a free fight, boys," quietly uttered Yellowstone, gliding rapidly forward, "charging" border fashion, by keeping securely covered while rapidly nearing the foe.

His comrades were nowise loth, and kept close at Yellowstone's heels. Not five minutes were used in getting within range, and then the four trappers each selected his prey. Then, mingling their peculiar war-cries with the still reverberating echoes, the hunters charged.

This attack in the rear threw the Indians into momentary confusion, and almost before they could realize the truth the trappers were in their midst, rapidly emptying their revolvers, leaving a trail of blood behind them. Nor were the whites much less astonished. They stared at the daring men, forgetting to use their weapons.

"Sock it to 'em, lads!" yelled Yellowstone, laughing shrilly and tossing his long hair back as an arrow tore through the tangled locks, grazing the skin of his cheek. "Thar's Paddy Smith to pay fer, yit!"

"Me, too—Jack, the varmints hes throwed me!" gasped Gila Hank, the leveled pistol falling from his hand, as he reeled back, a feathered shaft quivering deep in his chest.

Yellowstone Jack caught the dying man upon his left arm, and with a snarling cry, sent a revolver bullet through the throat of the Indian who had sped the fatal arrow.

"Don't let 'em git my skelp," faintly breathed the dying trapper, his eyes closing, the blood gushing from his lips.

"They must take mine fust! Brindle—Hoosier—hyar they come! Stan' fast—sock it to 'em!"

The Blackfeet, seeing the fall of one of the dare-devils, seemed to forget their first foes, and with exultant yells, rushed upon the three men, seemingly bent upon crushing them to the ground with the mere weight of numbers.

The defiant yell of the trappers replied. Standing around the stricken man they met the assault bravely.

Mingled with the revolver reports, came a sharper, louder detonation, and a tall brave who was leveling a blow at Yellowstone Jack, fell back, dead. A loud, fierce shout drowned all other sounds, and a tall, lithe figure leaped into the very midst of the Indians. One hand plied a long, heavy knife, the other clasped a revolver, whose every report sounded the death-knell of an enemy.

A dread fear seemed to paralyze the Indians for a moment. Then they broke and fled, with cries of dismay, mingled with a name that had often caused terror to Blackfeet hearts of late years.

"Pacanne-puck-on-che-luk!"

But they were not to escape so easy. The emigrants had, by this time, recovered from their double surprise, and as the savages broke, they were met upon every side. For a few minutes it was a massacre. Then half a dozen of the Blackfeet succeeded in cutting their way free, and gaining their animals, fled with the speed of despair.

Vernon Campbell quietly reloaded his weapons, and then picking out the braves who had fallen beneath his hand, he stripped them of the prized trophy.

Yellowstone Jack, after trying in vain to discover some traces of life in the body of his fallen comrade, strode up to the young scout with extended hand.

"Putt it thar, boss! You're a hull train, wi' a yaller dog under the wagon to boot! From the very way you putt in the double licks, I don't wonder 'at the varmints mistook you fer the Blood-Drinker."

"They call me that, sometimes," was the quiet reply.

"You ain't—thunder! a young feller like you—"

"I am old enough to have won that name from my enemies—and I am proud of it, too, since it shows that I have drank deep of the vengeance I swore to take for my murdered kindred."

The three trappers looked at the young man with feelings somewhat akin to awe. John Warren approached and started to thank the men who had come so opportunely to his assistance. Campbell abruptly checked him.

"Spare your thanks, sir—I did not attack those curs through any friendship for you. Indeed, if, as I believe, you belong to the wagon-train that passed over this trail to-day, I have been aiding your worst enemies ever since you left the settlements."

"My enemies—and yet—" stammered Warren.

"I don't mean Indians—it is because the party I was with has made allies of the Blackfeet, that I tell you this much. I hate them—my whole life is devoted to slaying them whenever we meet. But let that pass. You are in danger. The Blackfeet will be upon you to-night. Your only chance is to corral your wagons and fight them to the last, unless you wish to abandon all but your horses, and trust in their speed to carry you beyond pursuit."

* Literally, "The Man who Drinks Blood."

"From the settlements—then who are these enemies? You have told me too much, young man, not to say more," added Warren, suspiciously.

"Bah! how can you make me tell more than I wish to admit of my own free will? Do you think I fear death? Don't try to ride over me, rough-shod, stranger, or you'll get hurt," sneered Campbell.

"We're losin' time, boss," put in Chris Camp, uneasily. "The wimmen may be in danger."

"You are looking for two ladies—and a young man?" abruptly demanded Campbell of the emigrant.

"Yes—my daughter and niece. They were run away with—"

"They are safe enough, old man, though they had a narrow escape. Wait—you can ask questions afterward. I tell you they are safe enough. If you answer my questions freely, then I'll tell you something that may be of use to you. First, do you know anything of a man named Mat Mole; middle-sized, black hair, eyes and beard, hook-nose, rather good-looking, about forty years old?"

"No—I don't recognize the description."

"You have a brother in California, who wrote for you to come out there, to join him in business?"

"Yes, but how could you know this? I—"

"I do know it—that's enough. Listen now, and mark what I tell you. This Mole is your deadly enemy. He has followed you from Omaha, with a band of land-pirates. I acted as their guide, because I knew we would see something of the Blackfeet. We have driven you from the right trail, by false signs, which were read to you, as we intended, by a man Mole has in your camp. To-day Mole was joined by a band of Blackfeet; that's why I have deserted him. To-night they mean to attack you. You will find a year's spare ammunition destroyed. That is to be the work of Mole's man, your false guide, who calls himself—"

"Easy thar, old man—you're wuss'n a rattler, fer he shakes his tail afore he strikes!" yelled Yellowstone Jack, and a man was hurled headlong at the young scout's feet, a long knife flying before the quivering form.

"Brindle—Hoosier—close up! He saved our bacon—of these chaps mean to bounce 'im, they must take us first! Sock it to 'em!" added Jack, springing before Campbell, with drawn weapons, promptly backed up by his comrades.

The emigrants started back and drew their weapons. For a moment there seemed a fair prospect for another duel to the death, only between those of the same color.

"What do you mean?" demanded Warren, of Jack.

"What'd he mean, by tryin' to stick the young fellow here? From behind, too—the pizen snake!"

"It's true," observed Russel. "I saw it all."

"Wait," uttered Campbell. "This man must be the guide I spoke of. None other could have any motive for stopping my tongue. If so, his name is Chris Camp."

"That is his name; but he came to us well recommended."

"Exactly so—from Mole, who signed himself Captain Luke Harding, U. S. A.," sneered the young scout. "But there—I have warned you; heed it or not, as you please. You will find your friends either on their way to your weapons, or at the head of the upper pass. I left them there two hours since. Your horse and wagon, though, are at the bottom of the canon."

"Yes, and lead us there? I will pay you—"

"I want for revenge, not pay. These hunters can guide you. Good-by, now," and Campbell strode rapidly away.

"For him I'd stop him," muttered Warren, doubtfully. "I don't half like his story."

"You must walk over me an' my pards, then, boss," loudly returned Jack. "He saved our ha'r, an' shan't pay for it, ef it cos's a lawsuit. I reckon you'd better look to that snake yender. I hit him chury, an' his head's harder'n a nigger's."

Chris Camp had partially recovered from the heavy blow dealt by Yellowstone Jack's iron fist, and hurriedly snatched the knife that had fallen from his grasp. It was this movement that drew forth the trappers' condemnation.

Warren seemed in doubt what to do. The words of the scout added to the scout's attempt upon his life had made some impression upon his mind, yet the scout had played his part so well as to gain the good opinion of nearly all the emigrants. It did not seem possible that he could be such a double-distilled treacher to the men whose bread he ate.

"What's 't hit me?" growled Camp, glaring around upon the little party, an evil light in his blood-shot eyes.

"You needn't look no further 'n me," promptly replied Yellowstone. "I am ye—just as I would any other snake—as I see'd 'em crawl up ahind a man to strike 'im unbeknown, hah. Ef a feller wants to be so pizen mean, he ain't wuth bein' treated like a human critter."

"Better pray 'at the fancy don't cost ye too dear, young feller," grumbled Chris Camp, with a sickly smile. "I don't gen'ally fergit a blow very soon. Mebbe I'm slower 'n some, but I al'ays pays my debts—I do, so."

"I lent ye the lick out o' pure love, old pizenness. I'd do a heap fer ye, I've taken sech a fancy fer yer innercent-lookin' mug; I hev, so. But yi, I'm 'commodatin' to friends. F you think you owe me anythin', now's y'ur chance to settle. Rifle, peeps, or butcher—a critter-back or afoot, white man's style or Injun fashion—jest say the word, and Yellowstone Jack'll do the best he knows to make it interestin' fer ye."

"Not now; I said I kin wait. You look like you was a man. I'd like to do ye as nigh justice as I kin. Wouldn't 'sult ye by fightin' ye at hafe-cock—"

so to speak. You lent me a mule-kick. My head's dizzy, my han' trembles, an' I don't reckon I could fetch out your hull style as I'd wish. Unless you're pressin', we'll wait a bit—say ontel mornin'," drawled Chris Camp.

"Right you air! One thing fust—I fergot you'd promeessed old Gopher—Groundhog—whatever's the varmint's name—to spile these fellers' powder," laughed the trapper.

"Some folks'd say a man was a durned fool to go an' drive the nails in his own coffin—but you don't 'pear to think so, Yellowstone Jack," and the guide smiled again—a peculiar, sickly smile that boded danger.

"Come," impatiently interrupted Warren, "you can settle this quarrel some other time—or now, if you wish, but we can't stop to see it. If there is any truth in what that man said, we have no time to lose here. He said you men would know the way to this upper pass. Is there any nearer way than by going along this pass, then up the other?"

"Not fer hosses. I'll show ye the way, ef so be you'll wait long enough fer us to plant poor Heely Hank hyar, whar the reds won't stumle over his top-knot."

"Make haste, then. I'll ride on to the train and see if they have got back. If they have, I'll send word to you where the canyon divides."

Warren rode rapidly away, and the emigrants busied themselves in looking after their dead and wounded. Three had been killed—making four with Gila Hank, the Trapper. They were all single men, since Minnie and Ada were the only women accompanying the train, and so it was deemed best to bury them where they had fallen, rather than to carry them to the wagons.

"It's rough lines on us, boys," said Yellowstone Jack, sadly, as they composed the limbs of the dead trapper in a deep cleft in the rocks. "Two boys rubbed out in one day—hafs of our party in a week. 'Pears like this was goin' to be a costly trip fer us."

"Hank went under like a true mountain man, jest as he'd wished fer this many a year. He made his coup fust. I don't reckon the varmints 'll hev much to brag on, when all's counted. But thar was Chavez—he didn't die right. I'm dubious his sperrit 'll ha'n't us," muttered Brindle Joe.

"Not of I kin help it. To-morrer I'll take the trail—I'll try that witch-spook—whatever the critter is—an' see ef I can't rest pore Mexy. Ef I kin borrow a silver dollar, to run up, I'll be all right," said Yellowstone, thoughtfully.

"Goin' to jine in wi' these fellers? Ef what that feller—the Blood-Drinker—said is true, I reckon thar's goin' to be the tallest kind o' fun round hyar 'fore long."

"Ef they needs it, Hoosier, mebbe we'll lend 'em a hand—but not inside their durned corral. I fights free, I does."

"Whar's that pizen snake—the critter you hit, Jack," demanded Brindle Joe. "I don't see him—"

"Yender he goes—give me—too late! He's under kiver. So much fer bein' a durned fool! Ef I'd hed my way, he'd 'a' croaked 'fore this. Wal, they'll hev one more to fight, that's all," disgustedly cried Yellowstone, as he saw the form of the traitor guide vanish among the rocks.

Chris Camp had indeed slipped away while the men were busy with their dead. Pursuit was idle, considering the route he had chosen, and the party at once entered the pass. At the division they met Warren, who spurred up, pale and breathless. Nothing had been seen or heard of the women, and dreading the worst, the party rode on through the upper pass.

They saw blood-marks, traces of what might have been a death-struggle, but nothing more. Warren groaned with agony, and nearly fell from his animal.

"Don't take on so, boss," said Yellowstone, soothingly. "Mebbe they're all right yit, an' hyar's me an' my mates is ready to take the trail—or rather to hunt for the one we've lost—an' ef they're above airth, we'll find 'em. Meantime you'd better go look to the wagons, for you'll smell burnt powder afore mornin', sure. Corral them by the spring, under the rocks, an' keep good watch, ef you want to see daylight ag'in."

"I'll pay you—I have money—"

"Wait ontel we do the job—or stay; ef you hev a silver dollar, thanks! Now go—the sun's most down."

Warren finally yielded, and rode back to the wagons.

CHAPTER XI.

SCOUTING AND FIGHTING.

"I RECKON I'm up a stump, for once," grunted Brindle Joe, disgustedly rubbing his head. "A owl couldn't foller a trail now, even a'ter 'twas found, which this 'ne ain't, by a pesky sight!"

"F these gal critters'd on'y wore shoes like the hosses—but thar ain't enough on 'em to make a trail on fresh snow. I reckon we're played, boys," commented Yellowstone Jack.

"I've got a idee, mebbe 'tain't wuth much; I don't let on to be much a'count, unless it is on a trail. But I don't reckon thar's anythin' else we kin do, sence the varmints ain't a-goin' to trouble the train fer some hours yit, anyhow? What say, boys?"

"Reckon you'd better let us see this idee, fust; then mebbe we kin tell better," dryly observed Hoosier.

"Was thinkin'—but thar. You heerd what that feller said—him as called hisself the Blood-Drinker. You kin tell es well es me whether he was lyin' or no. You kin see, too, that somethin' has gone over the ridge o' the kenyon hyar. Mebbe it's only the boss-critters—mebbe the gal-critters

was in the wagon. Thar's on'y one way to settle that—by takin' a look where the outfit stopped. It's too dark now to look further fer a trail on these rocks. We kin go up the kenyon to a point whar we kin git down it, take a look at what thar is b'low hyar, an' git back in plenty time to take a hand in whatever fun thar'll be goin' on at the train yender."

"Sound hoss sense, an' well put, Brindle Joe," cried Yellowstone. "I reckon I know the right trail; come on."

Indeed, there seemed nothing else that could possibly be accomplished that night. For over an hour past the three trappers had been closely searching the ground in the vicinity of the upper pass, without success. The flinty wet sod retained no footprints. The perilous trail followed by the fugitives had been overlooked, for the trappers could not know that a Blackfoot chief had been guiding them, and there seemed scarce footing for a cat below the escarpment. They began to doubt the truth of what Campbell had told them—to believe that the depths of the canon contained the corpses of those they sought.

Yellowstone Jack led the way, proceeding rapidly, for a considerable detour must be made before they could reach a point where a descent into the canon was possible. And, despite the mere losses they had sustained, not one of the trio but was anxious to take part in the anticipated conflict at the corraled wagons.

"Somebody burnin' powder," suddenly uttered Yellowstone.

The report of a rifle rung out upon the evening air, its reverberation awakening a thousand echoes among the hills, until one could fancy the skirmishing line of an entire army at its deadly work. The trappers tried to settle the point from whence the shot proceeded, but in vain. The thousand echoes completely bewildered them, and a few moments later they resumed their course.

It was this shot that hurled Frank Maynard down the canon.

For nearly an hour the trappers pressed on, without further interruption, but then Yellowstone leaped quickly aside, crouching behind a bowlder, hissing:

"Cache, boys, there's a varmint just ahead!"

"Easy, friends," promptly replied a clear, not unmusical voice, from the gloom beyond. "There's no quarrel between us, that I know of."

"Who air you, then?" demanded Yellowstone Jack.

"A friend to all those who are not in league with the accursed Blackfeet. You saw me to-day when your comrade was rubbed out."

"The feller what called hisself the Blood-Drinker—but don't trust him too fur," muttered Brindle Joe.

"F you're alone, step out. I reckon we've got a crow to pick wi' you," added Yellowstone, uncocking his rifle.

"I am alone, but I'm not afraid to trust you. I set you down for true men, to-day, and I'm not often deceived in a man," quietly said Campbell, advancing.

"Folks is sometimes peskily bad fooled. You don't look like your tongue was crooked, yit you put us on a false trail to-day," dryly replied Yellowstone Jack.

"There is some mistake here—"

"Jest what I thort—a blamed big one, too. Didn't you say you left them gal-critters all safe? Then whar be they? They ain't whar you said, nor at the emigrant camp."

"I told you the truth. I saved them from being dashed into the canon, by shooting one of their hosses. They were all right when I left them. Besides, I warned them of the presence of enemies. It may be that they have been captured. These hills are swarming with their enemies, both pale-faces and Blackfeet."

"Look here—you say you've quit these fellers!"

"Yes—they have banded with my deadly enemies, the Blackfeet. For ten years past I have never missed an opportunity of taking a Blackfoot's scalp; is it likely, then, that I would fight with and for them, now?"

"Will you lend us a hand, then?" bluntly asked Yellowstone.

"In what way?"

"We was goin' to take a look in the kenyon—"

"That would be a waste of time. Those you seek are not there. If they have not reached their friends, then some of Mole's men, or some of the Blackfeet have captured them. I will do better. I will show you their camp."

"I don't know much about ye, stranger. You talk slick enough, an' I'd hate to think o' you as a trapper. But thar'll be three fellers nigh to ye, who're to'able quick on the trigger, an' who kin hit the bigness of a man when it's ciuss enough," slowly uttered the trapper.

"Nor am I used to such threats. I don't ask you to trust me. You need not accept my offer unless you choose," coldly replied Campbell.

"F you mean right, thar's no 'fense intended. What say, boys? Shall we go wi' him?"

"You kin trust him—a feller lyin' don't talk that a-way," promptly replied Brindle Joe, and Hoosier intimated a similar belief.

"Come, then; the trail is a roundabout one and the coyotes will soon be creeping up to surround their prey," tersely added Campbell, leading the way, at a rapid pace.

Though the sun had set clear, the heavens were rapidly becoming overcast, and the full moon only shone forth at rare intervals. Vernon Campbell led the way with a celerity and promptness that told how well he knew the country, and even the well trained trappers were forced to admire his noiseless progress.

More like a bodiless phantom than substantial flesh and blood.

Just as he gained the entrance to the little valley in which we first beheld the outlaw band, Campbell, with a warning gesture, sunk quietly down behind a large boulder. He was closely imitated by the trappers, who had also caught the muffled sound of horses' hoofs.

Lying thus, within ten feet of the narrow trail, the four scouts clutched their weapons, resolved to strike one blow before death, in case they should be discovered.

Riding two abreast, the horsemen filed past, speaking not a word, only a dull tramping sound betraying their passage, for their animals' hoofs had been muffled. And the scouts lay there outlined against the gray rocks, scarce daring to breathe, lest the sound should betray their presence.

The edge of the swiftly-moving cloud grew lighter and lighter; still the shadowy riders glided by like some never-ending chain. With the first moonbeam, discovery would be inevitable, unless—thank God! they are past!

Not one moment too soon—the silvery rays of the moon already outline the prostrate figures. But the night-riders do not glance back—they pass on, bent upon their mission of death and plunder.

"A close shave," muttered Campbell, with a long breath. "But a miss is as good as a mile. And now the trail is open to us—though I fear we will have little reward for our trouble. I counted them as they rode by, and I don't believe any were left behind at the camp. If so, and there were no captives with them just now, I am puzzled to guess what has happened to your friends."

"Waal sence we've come this far, reckon we'd better go on an' make sure," interposed Yellowstone Jack.

"Keep close to me, then. The camp is—or was—close by, in the grove, yonder."

Half an hour later the scouts stood within the deserted camp, moodily eying the few dying embers. A thorough scout through the valley left no room for doubt. The allied outlaws and Blackfeet had left, apparently for good, and had taken their captives with them, if any they had.

"It's useless looking for a trail or to waste time in trying to read signs on such a night as this. Besides, 'tis growing late, and the fun will open up over yonder before long. We can do no good here—perhaps we can be of use to these emigrants."

"It's poor manners to open a new trail afore the old one's wound up—but I don't see what else we kin do. Besides, they'll be kinder lookin' fer us, an' 'll need all the help they kin git of the lot we see'd all do thar best. I reckon you're right, boss."

Without any more words the scouts retraced their steps, and were soon gliding along through the deep pass, using all possible caution to avoid running into the enemy, at times forced to pause until the moon again hid itself beneath a cloud, lest the keen-eyed savages should glance back and discover them.

Suddenly they found themselves almost in the midst of a lot of mustangs, who snorted and pawed the ground suspiciously. These had been abandoned by the Indians and outlaws when the scout sent in advance brought in their report. Though the wagons were parked, everything was quiet in the camp, and the usual fires had been lighted. Hoping to surprise the emigrants, the savages had dismounted, leaving their animals unguarded, though securely tied to the rocks around.

The scouts quickly understood this, and Yellowstone was in favor of stampeding the herd, but Campbell demurred.

"That would spoil our plans, don't you see? The reds would know then that the whites had friends at hand, and would be on their guard. As it is, when they are at it, hot and heavy, we will come down on them with revolvers, and as we've all got pretty sound lungs, we can make 'em believe they're attacked by a regiment."

"Your head's level, old man! I knuckle under—I reckon I'll jest call you boss all the time!" said Yellowstone Jack, in a tone of admiration.

Campbell still led the way, and a few minutes more of cautious creeping carried them out of the pass and into the broad, level space before the corral. Crouching beside a boulder, they patiently waited for the moon to show itself, in order to gain an accurate idea of the enemy's position. They were not kept long in suspense. The light came, revealing to them the same sight that so astonished Pethonista and Ada.

Then came the single shot from the wagons—the clear, defiant shout, mingled with the death-shriek of the stricken savage—the wild, charging cry of the enemy as they darted forward—and then the withering volley—the strange sight upon the peak; and then the moon hid itself once more, as though loth to gaze upon such a terrible scene.

"Keep close to me—not a word until I shout; then go in for all you're worth!" hurriedly muttered Campbell.

The men glided rapidly forward. They had not noticed the weird being above, and were puzzled by the abrupt pause in the fight. But this was only momentary—then the horrible death-struggle for possession of the barrier was resumed.

A clear, trumpet-like voice rose high above the devilish din, and carried a thrill of terror into the Blackfeet hearts. One of their number fell, pierced with a rifle-shot. Then a wild cheer, long and seemingly composed of many voices, arose, and a death-hall swept through their crowded ranks.

The avenger was upon them!

Raging like a very fiend, Campbell leaped into their midst, nobly seconded by Yellowstone and his comrades. They rained death from every side, but not for long.

A cry of terror went up from the savages, and as with one accord they broke and fled, the white outlaws promptly imitated their example. But, close upon their heels trod the avenger, terribly vindicating his name and reputation.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SACRIFICE

With a strength and activity that was little short of marvelous, the weird woman, still holding the half-senseless maiden in her arms, glided rapidly away from the spot where lay the still quivering form of Mat Mole. Turning aside from the plain trail, she breasted the steep incline, leaping from point to point with the activity and sure foot of a mountain goat, or lightly scaled the piles of broken rock, seemingly gifted with the powers of a cat, in more senses than one.

Abruptly she paused, allowing Minnie to sink to the cold rock beside her. Leaning upon the heavy staff that had stricken Mat Mole senseless, the weird woman stared fixedly before her, into the dense gloom.

Minnie stirred uneasily. The shock of her fall had, in a measure, broken the spell that had fallen over her mind. She stared wildly around. She could barely distinguish the form of her strange captor, and might probably have taken it for another of the fantastic rock piles that stood upon every side, only for the words that dropped unconsciously from the weird woman's lips.

"Speak plainer—how can I understand when you whisper so low? It makes my head hurt—my brain whirl and dance and ring—yes, it rings now! I can hear the bell—Dolly wore it—my cow. That was before I died—when I was happy with *him*! Ah! why don't you speak clear—you are hissing like a snake—and I see it now! A snake! see it crawl—it comes nearer—it touches me—it winds about me—ah! 'Tis a snake—slimy and hideous, but wears *his* head—the devil who killed me! Down—down! Ha! ha! you creep in the dust—your head is bruised and bleeding—like my heart!"

The weird woman dealt fierce blows upon the rock with her staff, then sunk suddenly back, with a low moan of intense suffering, both hands pressed to her breast.

Minnie had been a terrified witness of her raving, but there was such a tone of suffering in the last words that she forgot all else, and strove to comfort the weird woman.

"You are ill—can I help you?" she faltered.

There seemed a magic in the words. The woman's tremblings ceased, a low, grating cry broke from her lips, and two bony hands clutched the maiden's shrinking figure, drawing her forcibly forward, until their faces nearly came in contact. The weird woman's eyes filled with a phosphorescent light that seemed to burn deep down into the terrified girl's brain.

"Now I understand—now I know what my good master meant! He says sacrifice—sacrifice! That is why he has sent you to me—I can read his sign stamped upon your forehead. It tells me that you must die. Come—don't you hear him calling? He will be angry if I delay. And then he will put another queen over my head," muttered the weird woman, lifting Minnie to her feet.

"Mercy—mercy! do not murder me! Spare me—I am too young to die!" pleaded the terrified maiden.

"Too young—I was young once. Young, loved and fair to look upon. Yet I died—yes, I died—yes, I died! He killed me. He made me sleep first—where I had such bright, blissful dreams—where all seemed love and happiness—where his voice sounded like the softest music—his features those of an angel. Ah, had it only lasted—could we have only drifted on forever in that land of dreams! But that was not to be. Something broke the spell. The music was the chorus of drunken devils—and then his mask fell off—it was the horrible head of a serpent that I saw. And then I died—yes, I must have died, because I never saw him again—for whom I gave up my immortal soul. The serpent came instead—slimy and loathsome. And then—my head turns round and round and mixes the words all up. I can't tell what came next—only I know that he killed me. He struck me on the head—here," and the weird woman pressed Minnie's finger into a deep furrow upon her head. "That's what makes it so light. Sometimes I have to tie it down to the rocks, to keep it from flying 'way off up there—where the bright star shines. Those are the times that my master comes to me—and we go floating all over the world, noting down the names of his new slaves. 'Tis glorious sport! He talks plain, then, while now he only whispers—ha! you hear? He says *sacrifice—sacrifice*! I am a queen, but he is my master and I must obey his commands."

"'Tis only the wind that howls through the hills—"

"Ha! ha! poor, silly fool—to think to deceive me—think you I know not the difference between *his* voice and the muttering of the wind? No, no—ye want to escape me and make him angry—you think that he will make you queen of this land, over my head, then. But I say no, you must go when he calls."

With a low, grating laugh, the weird woman dragged the maiden forward a few steps, then paused, holding her erect with that wonderful strength so many maniacs are gifted with, despite Minnie's desperate struggles to free herself; and then, exhausted, the poor girl lay half senseless in the weird woman's vice-like grasp.

"Look! yonder is my master—he is waiting for you! See him floating in the air below us! That is a good sign. Cease your trembling—there is nothing

to fear. He is in a good humor to-night—see him smile—he does not mean that you should die—he will catch you as you fall. Perhaps he has need of another queen—yes! see! he holds a crown for you. 'Tis smaller than mine—but that is just, since I am his favorite vassal. Do you see him? Answer me—I command you!"

"Mercy—have pity on me! I can see nothing, nothing but death!" moaned the poor girl.

"Then—but no—he motions for me to wait. The moon is just coming from under that black cloud. He means for me to wait until you can see what the future has in store. Stand up—he hates cowards," impatiently added the maniac, roughly shaking Minnie.

The dark cloud swept swiftly on. Its ragged edge grew brighter and brighter, until the broad silver moon moved majestically from behind the murky veil.

"Now, you can see—look quick! he is growing impatient—he beckons—you must obey!" shrieked the weird woman, lifting Minnie by the shoulders clear of the rock, holding her at arm's-length over the frightful abyss.

They were upon a narrow point of rock that overhung an almost fathomless canon. A fall from this would be inevitable death. The breath of life would have departed the body long ere it touched the jagged rocks below.

One terror-stricken glance did Minnie give, then closed her eyes in horror; almost unconsciously a prayer parted her lips.

"Mother in heaven! protect thy poor child!"

These simple words produced a strange effect upon the madwoman. The wild light faded from her eyes, the frenzied look abruptly fled from her wrinkled features, and with a gasping cry she tottered back from the dizzy verge, sinking to the rock beside the maiden.

"You have a mother—you pray to her?"

"My mother is dead; an angel in heaven," Minnie faltered, almost fearing to speak, though a wonderful change had come over the weird woman.

"I had a mother once, and she died; *he* told me that it was my bad conduct that broke her heart. She was good and pure and holy. Often when my brain is well, I wake up from a pleasant dream, and feel her warm kiss upon my brow, just as she placed it there when she bade me good-night. She didn't dream how wicked I was, or 'twould have been her curse instead! And that night I stole away like a thief. I was a thief, for I robbed them of their earthly peace for all time to come! And I was called mother, too, by a little angel; I don't remember why she left me. I was very kind to her. I would have died for her sake, and for his. But she went away; maybe mother called her. She thought I would teach her to be wicked like myself, perhaps."

There was something peculiarly touching in these words, uttered as they were in a subdued, mournful tone by that strange being, as she sat rocking to and fro, wringing her hands ceaselessly; and Minnie felt a choking at her throat, as she mastered her terror sufficiently to say:

"As you loved your child, by the memory of the mother that loved you, I beg you to have pity upon me; I never did you harm. I would like to be your friend, and help you if I could. I pray you let me return to my friends."

"Who are you that begs mercy of me?" abruptly interrupted the weird woman, springing to her feet, her eyes again filling with the fires of insanity. "Ha! I remember—you are one whom my master demanded as a sacrifice! Come—he is all-powerful—he must be obeyed!" and she dragged Minnie forward to the edge of the rock, paying no heed to her broken sobs and prayers for mercy.

The moon was again hidden behind a cloud, but the madwoman bent far forward, as though trying to pierce the intense gloom below. Then she rose erect, and passed one hand across her brow with an impatient gesture.

"I can see nothing—he is gone—there is only that hideous serpent writhing around, biting itself with its bruised, bloody head. Master! I am here, ready to obey your will. I will give way to no more foolish dreams of the dead past. Tell me what to do—ah, thanks, good master! I was afraid you were angered with me. See—here is the sacrifice you demanded—I send her to you—" but the weird woman held Minnie half suspended above the abyss for a moment, without relaxing her iron grip.

"Ha! he shakes his head—he points toward the Enchanted Valley—he vanishes! What does he mean? He rejects the sacrifice—or wishes it at his home. That's it—at his home!" and laughing shrilly, the weird woman flung the helpless girl across her shoulder, and darted from the spot, crossing the rough country with an ease and celerity fairly marvelous, avoiding the many pitfalls, as if by instinct.

Minnie was aroused from her stupor by the sound of shrill yells and rifle-shots, and as the madwoman dropped her to the rock, she caught a brief glimpse of the plain below. She recognized the white tilted wagons, and knew that friends were almost within reach. She stretched out her arms with a pitiful cry for help, for the moment forgetting that the emigrants were in nearly as great peril as herself; and then, as the moon hid itself, the weird woman ceased her mad ravings, and again lifted the girl in her arms, pressing on with unabated speed, despite the distance she had already traversed.

Minnie took no note of the lapse of time, so utterly prostrated was she, both from bodily exhaustion and mental anxiety. At times, when the ground was more level, the madwoman set her upon her feet and half led, half dragged her along, never pausing after leaving the pinnacle above the attacked wagon-train until she reached the valley of the flowing

ing, where the unfortunate trapper, Chavez, had his death some hours before. The weird woman dragged Minnie up to the peculiar that surrounded the spring, and then held erect upon the edge. The peculiar vapor, the huge bubbling, hissing noise of the troubled water aroused the maiden.

"Must die," she murmured, and then she said, "on. Are you ready?"

"Mercy—by the memory of your mother, mercy!" "I do not know the name. I am only a subject, though a queen. I can only obey my orders."

The strong hands closed upon the trembling form and raised the maiden from her feet, holding her poised above the bubbling waters for a moment. Then the helpless girl was flung into the midst of the Boiling Spring.

A single half-stifled shriek—a slight splashing—a heavy blows of the blood-stained staff; then a loud laugh. And the moon hid itself behind a black cloud.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN STRANGE COMPANY.

Down—down through the empty space whirled the body of the helpless young emigrant. A piercing cry of agony—a dull crashing sound as the body reached the tree-tops. The brittle pine boughs splintered and bent beneath the weight, though offering more and more resistance as the body neared the dead boulders that so thickly strewed the canon until, at last, the bruised, bleeding, senseless emigrant swayed up and down upon a sturdy bough, only a few feet above the jagged rocks.

A life-blood trickled from his temple and showed in a dozen places upon his person, where the cruel boughs had torn his garments and lacerated his skin. And thus, with gradually decreasing undulations, the body figure hung doubled across the limb, while the last gleam of departing day faded.

A shadowy shape stole silently along the bottom of the canon, gliding in and out, noiselessly passing from boulder to boulder, pausing nearly at every step to peer keenly ahead, above, around, as though leading some enemy's attack. Silently the shadow slides on, then pauses directly beneath the now motionless body. Again that quick, burning glance—und—then upward. A drop of blood falls upon the upturned face. The shadow flattens itself to the ground, and the muzzle of a rifle instantly covers the shapeless mass suspended in mid-air.

For a few moments, he stands staring at the gently swaying body, then drops his rifle, and nimbly scales the tree that bears such strange fruit. The limb bends and creaks beneath its double weight, but the adventurer manages to grasp the emigrant's collar, and then with considerable address, draws the senseless form toward him. He brushes back the long, matted hair, and eagerly peers into the blood-stained face, a strange, snarling sound rumbling from the massive chest.

Then the man cautiously worked his way to the ground, bearing the inanimate emigrant over his shoulder. Securing his rifle he retraced his steps up the canon, winding between or around the ragged masses of rock with an ease and celerity that proved his thorough knowledge of the trail, and still the red drops trickled from the young man's head, falling upon the rocky ground, and leaving a bloody trail behind them.

For fully half an hour the stranger bore Frank Maynard on through the night, then turned abruptly to the left, as though about to scale the almost perpendicular wall. After scrambling up a few steps, he stooped low down and parting a leafy screen where the wild grape-vine covered several stunted bushes, he lowered the body from his shoulder.

A few embers smoldered at some distance, and by the light of these, the stranger saw that he had a noble work ahead of him, as he stepped into the hollow of the rock, filled with Frank Maynard.

Descending Maynard where the feeble light fell upon the face, the stranger hurriedly wiped the blood from the pale features, and gazed long and keenly upon them. A half-sigh parted his lips, and as if unconsciously, he muttered:

"Not yet—not yet! How much longer must I wait? When'll the devil put him in my grip? Tears like I'll go crazy of this lasts much longer. Crazy—ha! ha! They did call me crazy once; but they lied—could a crazy man do what I did? No—no; I'd 'a' burnt up, too, like they did—but I fooled 'em! They thought 'twas my bones they found—jest's though I could die while he lived!" and the man laughed heartily.

A feeble moan parted Maynard's lips. The cold water used in cleansing the blood from his face had partially restored his consciousness, for despite his frightful fall and the outlaw's treacherous shot, Frank Maynard was not dead.

This sound seemed to calm the stranger, and he bent over the body for a moment eagerly. He could feel the faint fluttering of the heart, and the bright gleam of his broad-bladed knife was dimmed.

"He ain't dead yet—who knows? Mebbe the good Lord sent him to tell me whar I kin find him!"

For nearly an hour the stranger worked before his efforts to restore life were rewarded. And then, after a few incoherent words and a dazed stare around him, the young emigrant's head sunk back and he fell—a sleep that closely resembled death. And the stranger crouched beside him, never once removing his eyes from the pale face through those long, weary hours.

It was broad day in the outer world, though within

the rocky den a light was still necessary, since the bottom of the canon was never reached by the sun's rays, when Frank Maynard awoke to consciousness.

"Whar am I—whar has happened?" he murmured faintly, striving in vain to arise from the rude couch of leaves.

"You're in good han's, I reckon, an' 'll git along all right, if so be you 'boy orders an' take things easy," promptly replied the stranger, appearing far more like a sane man than when he had last spoken.

"I was falling—I had been shot—yes! I see it all now!" and Maynard shuddered convulsively. "We were dashed down from the ledge—down a horrible depth! And she—Minnie—was she—did you find her?"

"I only found you, swingin' 'twixt heaven an' earth on a pine branch. I don't reckon thar was any one else. You're all mixed up in the mind, I reckon—an' leetle wonder 'a'ter such a fall as that! But thar—I most forget. Stranger, on'y fer me, you'd 'a' died out yender. You was bleedin' fast—you couldn't 'a' lived a hour longer on'y I got you down, brung you hyar an' doctored up your hurts. You wouldn't lie to me, now, would ye?"

"I have nothing to conceal—why should I tell you a lie?"

"Nor laugh at me? They all do that—they think it's fine fun to lie an' laugh at me, 'cause they think I'm crazy. But I ain't—sometimes I 'most wish 't I was—then mebbe I might fergit. But I can't—I kin see everythin' that happened jest's plain now as that black day. Thar—don't look at me so dubious like," and a threatening glow began to fill the great eyes.

"What is it you want? It hurts me to speak—I am sore and aching all over," replied Frank, pettishly.

"Tell me whar he is—Zenas Kalloch?"

"I never heard the name before; I know no man who goes by that name," replied Maynard, after a moment's thought.

"Don't say that—don't, stranger! I tell ye I ain't crazy—I'm on'y Jet Cowles. Jest think how long I've hunted fer him—a lifetime—for years an' years, night an' day, never restin' or sleepin' or eatin'. Then don't tell me that—'a'ter I've lotted so much on what you'd say when you woke up. Mebbe he's fooled you, too, with his soft tongue—mebbe you think he's your friend. An' yit you've got a good face—it's like an honest man's face. You can't know what a wicked devil he is—but I'll tell ye. My brain's clear now—I kin see it all, jest as it came about."

"I was married—Mary an' me, an' we was so happy—tell he came. He was better-lookin' than me, an' hed more book-larnin'. We all liked him. An' then—why don't ye laugh, stranger? Ain't it fun to see a big cuss like me wif tears in his eyes? But thar—I can't help it! Whenever I think o' that time, when we was all so happy an' contented, it makes a babby o' me."

"He stole her away from me," continued the man, in a harsh, strained voice. "Her an' the babby. I know that much—then somethin' went crack in my head. When I woke up, I was shut up in a big stone house, an' they said I was crazy. But I knowed they lied—'twas some o' his doin's, to keep me from tearin' his black heart out. I waited a long time fer him, but he didn't come. Then I set the house on fire an' run away. I hed a dream that night, an' the good Lord told me he was up hyar in these parts. I can't find him, though I've bin lookin' ever sence. But you'll tell me whar he is—you won't try to hide him from me, now I've told you what a black heart he's got?" and the harsh voice softened and an imploring look rested upon the rugged features.

"If I knew, I would tell you gladly—but I don't. I never met any such man—" began Maynard.

"You're lyin' to me—I kin see it in your eyes! Tell me the truth, or I'll tear you limb from limb!" cried the madman, his eyes glittering viciously.

"Who dares raise an angry voice in my dominions?" cried a sharp voice, as the leafy screen rustled and a human figure stepped into the den.

It was the weird woman—the witch of the Boiling Spring. She stood leaning upon her long staff, her thorn-covered head flung proudly back, an insane fire in her eyes.

"Who air you?" muttered Cowles, passing a hand across his forehead with a puzzled air.

"Your queen—bend your knee when you address me," was the angry reply, as the weird woman shook her staff.

"Who air you? How'd you find this place?"

"Ha! ha! what would be the use of being a queen, unless one knew everything?"

"Do you know Zenas Kalloch? Kin you tell me whar I kin find him?" eagerly cried Cowles.

"Kalloch—Kalloch—is he a snake, too?" slowly uttered the weird woman, her voice changing.

"Yes—a pizen snake—tell me quick!"

"Kneel down there, and kiss the hem of my robe; then I will know that you are a true and loyal subject. There," and she laughed shrilly as the madman tremblingly obeyed her, "arise. You know whar the dead pine stands between three black rocks, up the canon?"

"Yes, yes, I know," hurriedly muttered Cowles.

"You will find the snake there. I bade him await my coming; but you will do just as well."

Jethro Cowles caught up his rifle and darted through the entrance. The weird woman laughed; low, but with a peculiar cadence that caused a thrill of vague apprehension to creep over the wounded man. Nor was this lessened when the strange intruder glided close to his leafy couch, crouching low down with the catlike movement of a velvet-pawed panther stealing upon its prey.

"You are not one of my subjects; I never saw you before!" she muttered, peering keenly into his face.

"I'm sure we never met before," said Frank, with a queer feeling as though the glittering eyes were fas-

inating him. "What is it true what you told him?"

"The canon is full of snakes; he may find the one he seeks—who knows? But, that does not matter. I wanted to get rid of him without trouble. And why, do you think? Because my master does not wish his secrets known. He bade me tell that man what I did, that he might not witness the sacrifice."

"The sacrifice?" echoed Maynard, bewildered.

"Yes; didn't you hear him—my master—whisper? He said, 'Send me this young man.' That means, you. Only spirits can go to him; so I must kill you."

These words were spoken in a low, even tone. Frank knew not what to think. It seemed like some fantastic dream. But, as the weird woman crouched lower as if for a spring, and the dull glow of the lamp-light fell upon a long knife, Maynard realized his peril, and with a faint cry, strove to arise and defend himself.

The woman sprung upon him, holding him down as easily as though he had been an infant, while the venomous blade was raised above his bared chest.

"I obey thee, master; see, I send you the spirit you demanded!" screamed the crazed creature.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW THE EAGLE KEPT HIS PLEDGE.

A hideous face, with burning eyes and floating expression—this much Ada Dixon saw as two powerful arms caught her up from the ground, pressing her tightly to his naked chest, and a deep, guttural exclamation sounded faintly in her ears as she yielded to a strange, deathlike faintness.

And with long, loping strides the savage sped on through the night as though dreading immediate pursuit.

On through the hills, winding, turning and twisting like one who seeks to throw a deadly enemy off the scent, the savage passed, never once halting until he had gained his mountain retreat.

With a shuddering, gasping moan, Ada opened her eyes, half-blinded by the cold water the savage had cast into her face. Brushing the icy drops away, she glanced hastily around—then shrunk back, trembling in every limb.

She was reclining upon a level rocky surface. A small fire burned brightly beside her, faintly revealing the surroundings. At her feet crouched an Indian; a monster, rather.

A massive, deep-bronze body, marked with nearly a score scars of bullet wounds and knife-cuts. Long, knotted limbs. Soiled ribbons and well-worn plumes decorated the grizzled scalp-lock. The one eye—a white, sightless ball marked where the other had been—was riveted upon her face with a burning, lustful glare. The thin lips were parted in a broad grin, revealing the broken, tobacco-stained fangs that served for teeth. A blood-red patch filled the middle of his face. It was where the nose had been. Either disease or the weapon of some foe had robbed the savage of this useful feature.

Little wonder that Ada shrunk back with a cry of terror and disgust. It was Beauty and the Beast—Day and Night—Innocence and Guilt—Hyperion and Satyr.

In that moment of horror, the maiden recalled the words of Pethonista, and she knew that she had fallen into the ruthless hands of the Night-walker.

The chief chuckled with glee as he saw Ada lift her head. She had lain so long without motion that he began to fear she would never awaken to life. He uttered a few rapid sentences in his own tongue, but as Ada only stared at him in mute terror, he added, in detestable English:

"Squaw open eye—dat good. Squaw no right sleep when chief want talk. Dat right—open ear—lis'en now to what chief he tell."

"Chief Neepaughweese—what you call Night-walker. Got plenty big voice—what say, dat mus' be. Blackfoot nation lis'en sharp when Night-walker talk. If tell braves go hunt scalp—dey tek de war-path. He say kill—tek pris'ner, it jest so. He say make fire—burn, pris'ner roast quick. If tell squaw—go to dis lodge—cook dat brave's meat, she go plenty fast. Dat what it mean to be chief. You up—stan'?"

Ada managed to utter a faint negative, as she saw the grim chief expecting an answer.

"You big fool, den," angrily replied the Blackfoot; then, as if unable longer to restrain his evil passions, he added, rapidly, in a tone that could not be mistaken: "Dis what Night-walker mean. You nice gal—mek chief good squaw. You people all kill—got no fadder, no mudder. Den Night-walker can't go hang presents by lodge door. See—hang knife on dis rock—dat he lodge. You tek dat down, give it back to chief—den we married quick. Dat what me mean."

As he uttered these words, Neepaughweese drew the scalping-knife from his belt, and thrust it in a crevice beside Ada, then stepped back with folded arms, complacently eying her trembling figure with his one orb.

The maiden hesitated only a moment, then grasped the weapon, standing with her back against the rock wall.

"Back!" she cried, as the chief extended a hand with a guttural exclamation of satisfaction, evidently believing this action an acceptance of his rude suit. "Back, I say! My arm is strong enough to drive this knife to your heart—and I will, if you dare lay a hand upon me!"

The chief's extended hand slowly dropped to his side. His one eye was fixed admiringly upon the defiant maiden. If he had coveted her before, she was doubly precious in his eye now, and he smiled with grim satisfaction at the strength of her spirit.

"Well, den, you have won the love of a Blackfoot woman, but you have not won the love of a chief. You must make for Neepaughweese and me!"

some the mother of great and wise chiefs. Neepaughwheese is—

"Note that is very brave when he sees nothing but a shadow of a brave crosses his path," added a clear, distinct voice, contemptuously. Night-walker turned abruptly, his scarred features reddened still more hideous by the scowl of rage that convulsed them. The angry exclamation that trembled upon his lips was changed to one of surprise as he recognized the bold intruder who had so audaciously concluded the speech he began.

"Pethonista!" he uttered, flashing forth his hatchet.

"Save me, Eagle—save me from that fearful man!" gasped Ada, her new-born courage deserting her as she recognized the Indian chief.

"Squaw have Eagle's pledge—he save her," was the quiet reply.

"She is my captive—what right have you to come between us!" haughtily demanded Neepaughwheese.

"She was mine first—you stole her away from where I placed her while I helped fight the pale-faces. My right is better than yours," coolly replied Pethonista.

"The Eagle is only a crow, and talks words that have no sense in them. Let him fly away to his own nest, or the Night-walker—" and the scarred chief shook his tomahawk significantly.

"A squaw uses her tongue," retorted Pethonista, drawing his knife and flinging it at Ada's feet. "Now, is Night-walker afraid to meet a chief?"

The giant chief sprang forward, and aimed a deadly blow at the Eagle's head. The stroke was adroitly parried, swiftly returned, and then the rival chiefs stood foot to foot plying their weapons with marvelous skill and celerity. Sparks fell upon every side in showers, the clash of steel rung out loudly. It was a duel to the death, dimly lighted by the red glare of the tiny fire. And Ada, crouching close against the rock wall, breathlessly watched the issue that was to decide her fate.

The stage was small for such a struggle, scarce ten feet in breadth, nearly square. Upon three sides a perpendicular face of rock, upon the other—nothing save empty space, until, near one hundred yards below, the jagged boulders that strewed the canon bed would welcome to certain death the one who should be forced or hurled over the escarpment.

Suddenly Ada gave a cry of pain, and sunk down, partially stunned. The hatchets had met with such force that the Eagle's weapon was torn from his grasp and hurled forcibly against the maiden's head.

Before Night-walker could fairly realize his advantage, Pethonista closed with him, forcing him heavily against the wall. The shock caused Neepaughwheese to drop his weapon, and striving to tear the sinewy hands away from his throat, a fearful struggle for the mastery ensued. Though taller and heavier, Night-walker was neither so supple nor active as his antagonist, and the trial was more even than one at first glance would have believed.

First one and then the other was forced back a pace, their limbs locked together, every muscle strained to its utmost tension. They fell heavily to the rock, tearing, biting, snarling like maddened beasts, first one on top, then the other. They rolled over the heap of glowing embers, scarce heeding the scorching pain, and then, still locked in tight embrace, they staggered to their feet, only to fall again, with crushing force.

The embers were scattered in every direction. Ada could just distinguish a writhing mass. She could not tell which was which, though she saw one form half-arise and with a killing exertion of strength hurl the other away into the darkness.

A brief space—and then came a dull thud from the canon below. And then the victor staggered to his feet, with a faint, breathless whoop of victory.

A cry of terror and despair broke from the maiden's lips. She fancied she recognized the scarred chief's voice.

Those few moments were full of bitter anguish for her. She could hear the heavy, labored breathing of the victor, and expected with each instant to feel his brutal grasp upon her person. But, instead, there came the words:

"No need be skere any mo'. Night-walker he dead—Eagle keep his pledge. Squaw plenty safe now."

The maiden's brain whirled, and she bowed forward with a low sigh. Her strength, both of mind and body, had been sorely tasked during the past fifteen hours. She had undergone enough to prostrate a strong man.

There was a gradually widening gray light in the east, when she returned to consciousness. At first she could not realize what had occurred, but then, as Pethonista, bleeding from half a score wounds, rose before her, a glad cry broke from her lips.

"You will save me—you will restore me to my friends?"

"Yeh—what Eagle say, he do. Frien's live yit, dough had big fight. Fight like debble—you frien's kill plenty Blackfeet," and the chief's brow darkened.

With difficulty Ada suppressed a cry of joy, but arising, though weak and stiff, she begged Eagle to lose no time in gaining the train.

Pethonista led the way along a narrow, winding ledge that finally carried them to easier traveling. Then the chief briefly told her how he managed to follow Neepaughwheese through the night in time to rescue her.

The trail was a long and rough one, and twice the fugitives were forced to hide in order to escape being seen by some of the scattered Blackfeet, and once to make a wide detour that consumed fully an hour. From a high peak, as he neared the pass, Pethonista could see that it was guarded by Indians, and after a little reflection he told Ada that

they must give up all hope of reaching her friends that day, or else take the perilous trail that wound along the right wall of the canon; that upon which they stood when Maynard was shot.

Ada besought him to take this trail—anything was preferable to longer separation from her friends.

And thus they crept along the narrow ledge.

Along the face of the canon, at that dizzy height, each footstep was one of peril, where one false step would doom the one taking it to a horrible death upon the rocks below.

Then the ledge widened. They proceeded more rapidly. Pethonista suddenly staggered back. A shrill yell burst from his lips. He flung aloft his arms and then disappeared over the escarpment. A sullen thud.

Ada sunk fainting to the ground, a rifle-crack ringing in her ears.

CHAPTER XV.

CAMPBELL COUNTS A COUP.

YELLOWSTONE JACK and his comrades closely followed the young avenger's advice, and when the war-cry of their dreaded enemy was recognized, so ably seconded, the savages broke and fled in hot haste.

The trappers and Campbell were warmly greeted by the survivors of the fight.

On counting heads, it was found that four emigrants had been killed, nine more wounded, one mortally. This heavy loss, together with the unknown fate of Maynard and the two women, cast a gloom over all.

During the night there had been a consultation between John Warren, Campbell and the trappers. It decided their plans for the day. If possible, they were to leave the train and search for the missing ones, though there would be considerable danger of being picked off by some of the scattered Blackfeet. The Blackfeet would never rest until they had avenged the death of their brethren. Though not strong enough to venture another attack, they would lurk around the trail until they could be reinforced. Beyond a doubt, some of their best runners were on the way for assistance.

"Whar's Hoosier?" suddenly asked Brindle Joe, as the party was about to start. "He ain't hyar!"

"I reckon he's all right," quietly replied Yellowstone Jack. "Mebbe he's gone on ahead to see if thar's any snags in the way."

It was in the gray of dawn. The trappers thought it best to leave the corral undiscovered, if possible, and so set out early, at first gliding directly away from the point where the trail had been lost on the preceding day. A few hundred yards would carry them to the broken ground, where they would have good cover to aid them in passing whatever spies the enemy might have upon the look-out.

As both Campbell and Yellowstone were well acquainted with the ground, little time was lost, every step leading in the right direction. Yet the sun was two hours high before they reached the mouth of the Wolf Pass, having done a great deal of cautious skulking in order to escape being seen by the Indians whom they discovered stationed at different points.

"I am puzzled," frankly admitted Campbell, after a considerable time spent in trying to recover the lost trail. "I can't see into it. Where can they have gone? I left them here, alive and well, with the worst of the storm over. It's strange—very strange!"

"Strange things is mighty apt to happen in these parts, stranger," quietly observed Yellowstone.

"I've seed stranger things 'ithin the week. An' that makes me think—yes, hyar 'tis. Mebbe you kin tell me what them crooked scratches mean," and the scout produced the bit of white buck-skin that had been wrapped around the arrow sent over his head by the strange maiden of the valley.

"It's writing!" exclaimed John Warren, taking the skin. "What does it mean? It says:

"Your lives are in danger. The Blackfeet have found your trail. To-night they will attack you. Your only hope is in instant flight. From one who wishes you well."

"Kin a sperrit write?" abruptly demanded Jack.

"That's a question you can answer as well as I. But why do you ask?" demanded Warren, curiously.

"Nothin'—never mind. The gals fust, I reckon. I move we take a look down the kenyon."

Warren turned pale as death, for he could not help but read the trapper's thought. Indeed, it was possible that the lost ones had been swept from the rock by the fearful tempest. And there seemed no other solution to the mystery. Had they left the spot by any other way, surely the keen-eyed scouts would have detected some signs of a trail. And there were none to be found.

"Look yender!" muttered Brindle Joe, after they had traversed something over a mile. "See that varmint, by the scramble pine on the rock. I kin drap 'im from hyar," and he handled his rifle eagerly.

"Don't be a fool, Joe; we don't want the hull kit on our backs, when we get in the kenyon. Mustn't burn powder ef it kin be helped—mind that."

"Yellowstone is right. We are not our own masters now, until this matter is fairly settled. After that there will be time enough for paying off old scores. I think we can manage to pass by without being discovered; if not, then leave him to me," said Campbell.

In single file the quartette glided along, taking advantage of every rock and bush to screen themselves from the roving gaze of the savage perched upon the point of rocks. This maneuvering consumed time, but it was finally successful, and then, when the look-out was safely passed, our friends increased their pace, and soon reached a point where they could descend into the canon.

At some distant age, this canon had evidently

been the channel of some powerful stream. The sides of rock were worn and eaten curiously, and some of the larger boulders that thickly strewed the bed were worn smooth and round. Others had more recently fallen from the heights above, and were still rough and jagged. There was a thin deposit of sand and earth along the bed, and this had, in places, given growth to shrubs, vines and even goodly-sized trees.

"We could play hide-an'-hunt-us hyar wi' the hull Blackfoot tribe fer a month o' Sundays!" observed Brindle Joe, curiously noting some of the covert.

"Ontel they'd roast us out, you mean. This stuff 'd burn like greasewood, in a fa'r breeze."

A low exclamation from Campbell, who was a few yards in advance, interrupted the trapper. He was bending over a blood-stained rock that had barely dried.

"Sign—and it came from up there," he slowly said, pointing upward, where the bent and broken branches of the tree lent emphasis to his words.

"Cain't be; thar's no gittin' 'ithin half a mile o' the edge up thar," positively returned Jack.

"Yes there is; I know a trail that would lead one right above us, though 'twould require strong nerves and a steady hand. And some one has tried it, as you see."

"Must 'a' bin the devil, then, fer no human critter could fall down from thar an' live a'ter. Yit hyar's a trail, one a blind man could foller," retorted Brindle Joe, pointing to a few drops of blood that his keen eye had discovered, leading away from the spot.

Campbell and Yellowstone eagerly bent over the trail, and Warren waited for their verdict with beating heart. Yet it did not seem possible that his lost ones could have reached this spot.

"We'll see where it leads, anyway. Brindle Joe, will you trail, or shall I?" uttered Campbell.

"You lead; we'll kiver you. Thar may be varmints at t'other end o' this. Old man, you kinder keep ahind, so's not to spile the trail. Now, stranger, spread y'rself."

But Campbell found little difficulty in following the trail. The blood-drops were never more than a yard apart, sometimes even closer, and a far less experienced eye than his would have sufficed for the task.

"Bleeds like a stuck pig!" muttered Brindle Joe.

"Must be a healthy critter, to walk so fur an' so stiddy, a'ter a tumble like that," added Yellowstone.

The trail led on for over half a mile, then seemed to end all at once. The blood-drops were no longer to be seen, until Yellowstone pointed to a place where the wall slanted abruptly down to the canon bed. His keen eye had detected a tiny blotch of blood.

"He's in them bushes, I reckon," muttered Jack.

His voice was abruptly drowned by a half-stifled shriek, coming from the point toward which their faces were turned. Then the words:

"Mercy—would you murder me?"

"It's Maynard's voice—I know it!" cried Warren, leaping up the rude steps and tearing aside the vine-wreathed bushes, revealing a dark cavity.

"A'ter 'im; he'll git into a pizen scrape, the old fool!" gritted Jack, as he sprang forward.

A strange scene lay before them. The weird woman clutching a knife, bending over the feebly struggling emigrant. She had heard the cry of John Warren, and turned her head in surprise.

The emigrant sprang forward and wrested the weapon from her hand, hurling her with violence against the rocks. She dropped in a heap, senseless.

"Thank God! I owe you my life!" faintly uttered Maynard.

"My child—Minnie—where is she?" cried the almost-distracted father, staring wildly around, as though hoping to discover his lost ones hidden within the cave.

"God knows!" brokenly replied the young man.

"They were with me when I was shot—then I fell down from the ledge we were upon. A strange man found me, and brought me here. Then she came, and—"

"Whar is he? Mebbe he kin tell us somethin'," suggested Yellowstone Jack, as Warren sunk to the floor.

At this moment a rifle-shot sounded from without, mingled with a shrill yell of mortal agony; and a moment later there came a dull, heavy, sickening thud upon the rocky bed of the canon.

"Come out here, you fellows—I've made a coup and found a prize!" cried Campbell's voice, exultantly.

As the trio emerged, they saw him bending over a horribly crushed and mangled corpse, coolly tearing off the feathered scalp-lock.

"A chief—see!" and he held up the disgusting trophy, while a fiendish expression distorted his pale features. "A chief of the Blackfeet; and he was in nice business, too! You see the ledge above—it's where the blue line of rock ends. He was upon that, with—now, old man, don't go into a fit—she's all right, though she did fall back out of sight—I said he was with a woman—a white woman. You're right, old man—'twas one of those we were looking for. The blacked-haired one."

A groan of agony burst from Warren's lips; but then he quickly brightened up. Though Campbell had seen only one, it was possible that Minnie was also there. At least Ada would be apt to know where she was to be found.

"Quick—we must rescue her—oh, hasten!"

"Easy, old man—thar's the young feller an' the—"

"Thar goes the witch!" yelled Brindle Joe, pointing along the canon bed. "How'd she slip past us?"

"You fellers kin see to the gal—I'm goin' to ketch that witch," gritted Yellowstone. "Thar's Chaves to pay for yit!"

He darted away, closely followed by Brindle Joe.

"We'll have to leave the young man, since he is unable to walk," said Campbell. "We can send back for him after we rescue the lady. I'll tell him."

Maynard gladly consented to remain behind, when he heard what had happened. Campbell left him a revolver, to defend himself with, in case of need, and then left the den, accompanied by John Warren.

"Now old man, put your legs to good use. The sooner we get up thar, the easier I'll feel," muttered Campbell, darting away.

CHAPTER XVI.

YELLOWSTONE JACK AND THE WITCH.

YELLOWSTONE JACK and Brindle Joe pressed forward at top speed upon the trail of the weird woman. Yet their progress was comparatively slow, the bed of the canon growing more obstructed by bush and boulder the further they advanced, until, at last, the two trappers could not proceed faster than at a walk.

The woman had disappeared, but Jack could hear her forcing a passage through the vine-clad bushes, whenever he paused to listen. Nothing would be easier than for her to slip into some of the numerous coverts that lined both sides of the canon and lie still until the trappers had passed by, then take the back trail and give them the slip. If he could once drive the game from the canon, he felt confident of the result. Surely two trappers could run down a woman in a fair chase.

Separating, he and Joe advanced leisurely, thoroughly beating the cover before them, to make sure the game was still afoot. Owing to their activity, they still advanced at a fair rate.

"Yonder she goes!" cried Brindle Joe, pointing ahead, where he had just caught a glimpse of the woman fleeing with unabated speed and vigor.

"Make for the spot at once, then; no need o' wastin' time beatin' up whar we know she ain't," replied Yellowstone Jack, increasing his speed.

Little did either of the trappers dream what a prize they had missed by leaving this patch of brush unsearched. Even at that moment a pair of dark eyes were glaring at them from the cover. At any other time the acute sight of Brindle Joe would have detected signs of a fresh trail, but now neither he, nor Yellowstone had eyes for aught other than for the slayer of their comrade, Chavez.

"I really b'lieve the critter is a spook!" muttered Brindle Joe. "Look how she holds her own—we'd 'a' run a buck injun down afore this, an' she don't bear to be fagged one mite!"

"Spook or human, I'm goin' to see the wind-up, or else bust somethin'," grated Yellowstone Jack. "If I can't ketch her a-runnin', I'll try what vartue thar is in a quarter-ounce o' lead."

"Wish 't' you'd 'a' run up that silver dollar," muttered Joe, dubiously. "Lead's no good thar!"

"Don't know—the old man handled her like she was flesh an' blood. Don't reckon a spook 'd 'a' fell so solid as she did ag'inst the rocks. But thar—spread out. We must keep her afore us ef we want to make a coup."

In this manner the chase lasted over nearly two miles of the canon bed. At times the trappers would lose sight of the woman, and fearing she had sought some covert, hoping thus to give them the slip, they would beat the bushes, peer into every rocky niche as they passed and presently catch a glimpse of their game far ahead of them. Then another spurt would end as before. Yet they knew that this could not last much longer, for the canon ended less than half a mile further, after which the ground was more open. And upon this they hoped to soon run the woman down, unless, indeed, she should prove the witch they had at first believed her.

"Jest look at the pizen ca'!" exclaimed Brindle Joe, in a tone of wonder, pointing ahead.

Active and quick-footed almost as the mountain goat, the witch of the enchanted valley was scaling the rocks that blocked up the end of the canon. As Brindle Joe spoke, she gained the top, and waved her staff with a little cry of triumph toward the pursuers.

"Ef ye're human, hy'ar's what'll make ye a sperit in good earnest!" gritted Yellowstone Jack, as he hastily leveled his rifle at the witch and fired.

When the smoke cleared, there was nothing to be seen but rocks and bushes. The trappers glanced at each other. The same thought might have been read in the eyes of both. Their superstition was fully aroused.

"T went smack through her an' she didn't winch," muttered Brindle Joe, nervously.

"I drewed a fair bead—nur I ain't in the habit o' missin' marks o' that bigness so close by. Ef she's human, I'd 'a' downed her, shore!"

"Reckon we'd better take the back trail. I don't like this kind o' business overly much—'t don't set well on my stomach," added Joe, with a sickly grin.

"You kin, 'f ye like, but I won't. I'll see this thing through or bust. I sot out to foller the critter, an' foller her I will, ef she leads me to the very gates o' Hades itself," deliberately uttered Yellowstone Jack, as he carefully reloaded his rifle.

Though his face was pale and set, there was a look of determination in his eyes that Brindle Joe could not mistake, and he knew his comrade too well to attempt a remonstrance. Instead, he said:

"So be it, then. Brindle Joe mayn't be much a-count, but he's too white to sneak out o' a scrape his pardner means to face. I reckon you 'n' I'd order be a match fer the old 'un, even ef she does lead us thar—so pitch y'ur jinny!"

Cautiously scaling the rocks, Yellowstone Jack peered over the top. He could see nothing of the

woman, but he did discover something else that drew a cry from his lips as he scrambled forward.

Several drops of fresh blood were sprinkled upon the white rocks. It was here that the woman had last been seen. Beyond a doubt this blood was hers.

"How air you, spook!" laughed Jack, his face brightening. "Now what ye think, Brindle Joe?"

"I reckon we've bin makin' pizen fools o' ourselves," quoth the trapper, after closely examining the telltale spots. "Spooks don't hev blood—leastwise so Black Harris sais. He said he rammed daylight clear through his spook, at the medicine spring, a round dozen o' times, an' nary a drop o' blood did it let out. I reckon we've struck a crazy critter, 'stead o' a spook."

"Crazy or not, she rubbed out Mexy. Don't forget that," quickly replied Yellowstone Jack.

"Thar she goes!" cried Brindle Joe, pointing ahead. "Makin' fer the medicine valley, too. 'F she gits thar fust, it's good-by John!"

Yellowstone made no reply, but sprang forward at full speed after the fleeing woman. Their delay in reloading and examining the rocks had given the chased woman fully a mile start, and she was running swiftly, heading for the valley of the Boiling Spring, now not more than two-thirds of a mile distant.

Yellowstone Jack was a splendid runner, and gradually left Brindle Joe in the rear, rapidly gaining upon the fugitive. He was not more than two hundred yards behind when she entered the valley, and strained every nerve to its utmost tension, hoping to overtake her before she could reach the spring where she had so mysteriously eluded him once before, even dropping his rifle in his eagerness.

The witch gained the curb surrounding the spring, and flung herself headlong forward. But just at that moment the strong hands of Yellowstone Jack closed upon her skin garments, and he strove to drag her back. She kicked vigorously, and striking his shin, knocked his feet from under him, and then both fell together into the Boiling Spring.

A cry of horror burst from Brindle Joe's lips as he saw them disappear, and saw the spray dash up, telling him that both had fallen into the medicine spring. And the superstition that was his second self whispered him that Yellowstone Jack had fallen blindly into a trap set for him by the spook, who had led them on in this wild race for no other purpose.

And still, while believing this, the faithful fellow ran forward and scrambled up the curb. He stood there as if petrified. Then a violent trembling seized upon his limbs.

The spring was quietly bubbling up in the center, as usual. Its waters were clear and limpid. The bottom was clearly visible, as well as the sides. There was not a trace of either Yellowstone or the witch! Where had they gone?

With a cry of horror Brindle Joe tumbled down the white curb and dashed swiftly down the valley. But he did not run far before he checked himself, and glanced back. Then he uttered, huskily:

"Durned ef I do! I tole Yellowstone I'd see it through, an' I will—or die for't! He's gone—I feel it in my bones. 'Tain't likely he'll ever be let come back, but she will—she did once, fer this makes twicet I've seed her jump in thar. An' when she does come, she'll find me. Mebbe 'twon't do no good—but I'll shoot her ef powder an' lead kin do the job. S'pcsin' it don't—what then? Mebbe she'll take me to whar Jack is!" and, strange as it may seem, the rough trapper found consolation in the idea!

It was no common bond that united the trappers. Their love for each other was stronger and purer than that existing between most brothers.

Brindle Joe retraced his steps and crouched down beside the curious mound already referred to. Then, with cocked rifle he watched the medicine spring. He had scarcely settled himself in this position, when he sprang to his feet with a low cry. A strange sound came to his ears, faint and indistinct, but indescribably sweet. It seemed like one singing in the distance, nor could he tell from what direction the sound proceeded, though he slowly circled round the mound. He could see nothing unusual. The valley seemed uninhabited save by himself.

"It's some spook business," he muttered, as he doggedly seated himself in his former position. "Mebbe they want to skeer me away—let 'em skeer an' be durned!"

The singing ceased as abruptly as it had begun, and then Brindle Joe heard a faint sound just above his head. Glancing up, he saw a figure standing upon the mound, and quickly flung up his rifle. But before he could shoot, the shape disappeared.

Now thoroughly aroused, the trapper dropped his rifle, and with bared knife clenched betwixt his teeth, he scaled the mound. This was a difficult task, for the sides were hard and slippery, save here and there a slight knob or projection. As he gained the top, a cry of astonishment broke from his lips.

This mound had been spoken of as a sort of truncated cone, evidently composed of the same substance as that surrounding the Boiling Spring. But now Brindle Joe found that the cone was but a shell—that it contained a hollow, shaped like the inside of an iron pot. The sides were smooth and even; a few points or knobs could be seen, but nothing large enough to conceal a kitten. And yet there was nothing to be seen of the figure that he had just caught a glimpse of. Little wonder that he was surprised.

"It's the devil's work!" gasped Joe, tremblingly. "Yit thar's Yellowstone! Mebbe thar's a hole or a trap down thar—mebbe it's only tricks, a'er all."

With this the trapper attempted to descend the hollow. His foot slipped and he bumped down with more speed than comfort. Disregarding his bruises, Brindle Joe carefully searched on every side for a hidden opening, but in vain. Not even a crack in

the hard, smooth substance could he discover. Mad with disappointment, he stamped heavily upon the side. It seemed solid. There was no echo.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT LAST.

FORTUNATE indeed was it for Mat Mole that the weird woman did not repeat her blow. As it was, the outlaw lay senseless for more than an hour, and it was nearly twice that length of time before he recovered sufficiently to resume his course.

He had not caught a glimpse of his assailant, but immediately jumped to the conclusion that it was Pethonista, the Blackfoot chief, who had dogged his steps and felled him with a coward's blow, that he might carry out his first intentions.

The position of the moon told him that a long time had elapsed since the stroke; far too long for him to hope to overtake his assailant that night, even if he could strike the right trail. And so he made the best of his way through the hills toward his camp. At least John Warren's party should not escape him.

But, as the reader knows, he was doomed to disappointment in this matter, also. Before he could reach the valley in which he had left his followers and Blackfoot allies, he heard the sound of firearms, and from the direction, knew that the emigrant train had been attacked. He knew then that the impetuous Night-walker had grown impatient at his long absence, and had made 'he attempt. He knew, too, that his men would not allow the Blackfeet to attack alone, lest they should discover the chest of gold he had spoken of.

"They'd no right to move without my orders, curse them!" snarled the outlaw. "But then, maybe 'tis for the best, after all. I don't believe the girls have had time to reach the train, since that traitor Eagle struck me such a foul blow, and if not, we can easily pick them up to-morrow. Guess I'd better go look after the boys, anyhow. Ten to one they'll get to blows among themselves over the gold."

But the worthy Mole was taking far too much for granted. Instead of finding his men quarreling over their booty, he met them straggling back, badly whipped, fully one-half of their number being killed or disabled. They had fought with uncommon daring, pressing to the front to be the first ones to grasp the golden prize, and had suffered in proportion.

As this is not intended for a Billingsgate dictionary, the reader will understand why I press briefly over the proceedings of the outlaw and his confederates during the remainder of that night. Certainly the office of recording angel was no sinecure.

Assuming command of the remnant of the defeated parties, he stationed men at all points of observation to watch the emigrants and to await reinforcements, for which runners had been dispatched. This done, there was time then had time to think of his own personal affairs.

Where was Minnie? Where the Eagle? Had he borne her away? If so, where, and for what purpose? Was it possible that the chief was befriending the girls and was aiding them to reach their friends?

Reasoning thus, Mat Mole scouted through the hills and around the emigrants' camp, in hopes of solving his doubts one way or another. A little after day-break he struck the trail left by the weird woman, some distance beyond the point where she had saluted the rival parties fighting for possession of the train, and his keen, well-trained eye soon discovered the prints of a small, slender foot, that he knew could only belong to one of the two maidens. Hoping it would prove to be Minnie's trail, he exerted his utmost skill for over an hour, losing the trail fully as many times in a hundred rods, finally being thrown entirely off the scent.

For more than an hour he searched for the continuation of the trail, but in vain. And then, as one is apt to do when sorely puzzled, he wandered on aimlessly, deep buried in thought. All at once he gave a start and stooped over some object that caught his gaze.

"It's the same track—only I don't see the girl's!" he muttered, eagerly. "Still, she is such a light weight, this ground wouldn't take much of a trail from her. I'll follow it, now, or bust something."

Calling all his skill into play, Mat Mole did follow the trail until it led him to the foot of a pile of rocks that he knew formed one end of Bad Wolf canon. They evidently passed over this, and after some hesitation he resolved to follow it to the end. Once in the canon he soon picked up the broken trail, and found less difficulty in following it, though still he could see no signs of Minnie's having passed along there.

Shortly after this Mat Mole heard a rifle-shot, mingled with a shrill yell that could only proceed from the lips of a death-stricken Indian; and knowing that the enemies of the Indians were equally his foes, the outlaw lost no time in catching.

A few minutes later he heard a yell from below, and then a wild, strange figure glided swiftly past his covert. The brief glimpse he had did not carry recognition with it, and he believed the fugitive was an Indian. He had about decided to follow after, to learn what had occurred, when he heard rapid footsteps, and cowered back. Yellowstone Jack and Brindle Joe dashed past him. Mole had never met them before, nor did he care particularly about making their acquaintance.

He heard a rifle-shot from above, and then started on down the canon, thinking he had better make good his retreat before the mountain men should return. He could see now, from the fresh trail as he passed over a moist, sandy spot, that the fugitive was the person he had been trailing, consequently there was nothing for him to hope from that quarter.

* "Pitch your jinny" a once popular bit of Western slang, though from what derived, I cannot learn.

He would make the best of his way out of the canon, and return to his camp, trusting that matters would come all right in due course of time.

And so he blindly rushed upon his doom!

Suddenly Mat Mole crouched down beside a rock, half-raising his rifle. But after a keen glance at the suspicious object he arose and advanced.

"A body—that then accounts for the shot and yell I heard," he muttered, as he stooped over the mangled heap. "As I live, 'tis the Eagle!" he added, in surprise, catching up the left hand and looking at it closely. "The middle finger missing, and here is my name, as I pricked it the day we took that oath to be brothers forever."

Mat Mole was so deeply interested in this discovery that he did not hear the faint rustling sound as the bushes parted behind him, nor the stealthy step as a wild-looking figure stealthily glided nearer and nearer, an expression of horrible exultation resting upon the haggard features and glowing in the large, sunken eyes.

Then a hoarse, snarling cry sounded in his ears, and he was forced to the ground, while iron fingers seemed fairly tearing his throat out. In vain his struggles—though more than ordinarily strong, the outlaw was now in the hands of one beside whom he was a very infant.

"At last—at last! I've got ye at last, Zene Kalloch!" snarled the giant, whirling his captive over upon his back, and glaring into his face. "Look at me—do ye know me? Hev I changed so much? It's your work, then—you made me what I am—an' now you've got to pay for it, Zenas Kalloch!"

"I ain't Zenas Kalloch. There's some mistake," faltered the outlaw, as his throat was released.

"Don't lie—don't lie to me. I know ye—an' you know me, too; I kin see it in your eyes. An' now I've got ye d'y' know what I'm goin' to do, Zene Kalloch? I'm goin' to kill ye—not all to one't. No—no! that'd be too great a blessin' for sech as you. I've got to pay ye fer all—fer her—fer Mary, fer her mother, who died o' a broken heart over her child's disgrace—fer myself—fer everythin'. It's a big debt, but it's got to be paid, es far es your or'nary life kin pay it. See—this is the way, I'm goin' to pay it—by inches!"

CHAPTER XVIII. RETRIBUTION.

Hasten as Campbell and John Warren might, fully an hour was occupied in traversing the ledge to the point where the scout's too fatal aim had killed Eagle while nobly keeping his pledge.

Campbell drew back, a finger upon his lips.

"Be cautious—she is there, and seems to be either sleeping or in a faint. If awakened suddenly, like as not she will rush over the ledge before she knows it, thinking you are an enemy. Creep past me, and stand so you can catch her if she springs up."

John Warren obeyed, and then called the maiden by name. She did not answer, but lay still and motionless as though dead. A wild fear assailing him, he stepped forward and grasped her arm. With a low cry of terror, the girl awoke, and struggled desperately to free herself. Only for Campbell's precautions another tragedy would have occurred. As it was, Ada soon recognized her uncle, and sunk sobbing upon his breast, nor could she answer his questions for some minutes. She had been sorely overtasked, since the bursting of the *poudree*, and when she saw her guide and protector hurled over the ledge to death, she fell back in a deathlike swoon. From that she fortunately sunk into a heavy sleep, else, in her half-distracted condition, she would have fled from the terrible spot, only to fall a victim to her agitation along that perilous trail.

"Wait until we get up to the level ground," impatiently said Campbell, checking the emigrant in his incoherent questions. "We are in danger here, and if discovered good-by to our lives as well as the hope of regaining your daughter."

The young scout lent Ada what assistance she needed, with a quiet respect that was very grateful.

A wild yell came from below—one of agony the most intense, followed by a burst of devilish laughter. The men interchanged glances. The same thought could be read in their eyes. They believed the shriek came from the lips of Frank Maynard.

"We can do him no good now," muttered Campbell, gloomily. "T'would be all over before we could return. Besides, he is a man; and we have a helpless woman here to save. We must push on."

As Ada could scarcely move one foot before another, the emigrant raised her in his strong arms, and the party progressed more rapidly. Thus placed more at ease, Ada briefly told her story, describing as well as she was able, the man who had parted her from Minnie.

"It's Mat Mole—the man who has followed you so far," said Campbell. "There is one comfort in it, though. Her life is safe in his hands. So cheer up, old man. Your daughter shall be restored to you, if mortal man can do it."

An hour later they safely entered the corral.

While Warren was busy attending to Ada, Campbell briefly told what had occurred, and asked for volunteers to return to the canon, to rescue Frank Maynard, or if dead, to give his body Christian burial and take what vengeance they could upon his murderers. As one man the emigrants stepped forward, but Campbell did not deem it prudent to weaken the train much, so he only selected three men. These he believed would be enough, since his object was to avoid, rather than court, a collision.

Campbell led the way round by the upper end of the canon, following almost directly upon the footsteps of the doomed outlaw.

They had not followed the canon for more than a few hundred yards before they were interrupted by

faint cries and screams from ahead. There could be no mistaking this. It was the complaints of some one who was being subjected to torture. Though expressing intense agony, the voice seemed that of one well-nigh exhausted.

"There's the devil's own work going on there," muttered Campbell, hoarsely. "Look to your weapons, but don't burn powder until I give the word," added the scout, as he resumed his progress.

A few more minutes sufficed to carry them to the point from whence the torture could first be seen, and the entire party abruptly halted, fairly sickening with horror and disgust.

The naked body of a human being was suspended by its feet to a pine tree, his hands bound firmly to the trunk, so that he was held motionless, head downward. Before him stood a wild, blood-stained figure, flourishing a keen knife, with which he was literally flaying the unhappy wretch alive, by inches at a time! Long strips of skin swayed to and fro as the bared muscles quivered with the torture. The victim was a mass of blood from head to foot. His voice was faint and weak. Evidently his race was well-nigh run.

"Keep under cover," Campbell whispered, to his men. "I believe I know both those men. If so, our young friend may be safe yet."

Drawing a revolver, the scout glided rapidly yet noiselessly forward, keeping behind the madman, who was too busily engaged in his long deferred vengeance to take heed of aught else, and then Campbell dealt him a quick, heavy stroke upon the back of his head with the brass-bound revolver-butt that felled him like an ox in the shambles.

"Come up, lads, and help me loose this poor devil, though I don't suppose you'll fee much sympathy for him when you know it's Mat Mole, the same one who has brought all your trouble upon you."

The moaning wretch was gently lowered to the bloodstained ground, and then Campbell added:

"Dose him; if possible, I want him to answer me a few questions. Do the best you know how, while I go see if young Maynard is all right."

Campbell found Frank in a sort of stupor. The horrible cries and sounds from without, unable as he was to learn their cause or purport, had thrown him back not a little.

Fearing lest Mole should die too soon, the scout returned to question him. But the outlaw was already insensible to pain, and a few minutes later drew his final breath.

Campbell had learned what a sad error he had made in shooting the Eagle for an enemy, and buried his mangled corpse in a deep cleft, covering it with boughs, rocks and earth. In another spot the outlaw was buried.

Then a rude litter was made, and Maynard placed upon it. The giant, who seemed now another person, since the outlaw's death, was unbound, and though watched, quietly walked beside the rest.

The wounded man was safely conveyed to the corral, where he was greeted as one risen from the dead. But he still remained buried in that deep, heavy stupor that looked like death.

CHAPTER XIX.

YELLOWSTONE JACK IS ASTONISHED.

It was with a sensation of unutterable horror that Yellowstone Jack felt himself dragged into the Boiling Spring by a weird woman, but the catastrophe could not be avoided, struggle as he might. And then he felt the bony fingers of the hag clutching and tearing at his flesh like the claws of some infuriated animal.

A dim, peculiar light—like the "shadow of a light"—then slowly dawned upon him. A strangely sweet sound came indistinctly to his ears, drowning the painful ringing in them. Wild visions seemed to float before him, alluring, tantalizing. But when he strove to grasp them, he found his limbs powerless. A spell seemed upon him. And yet he could move his eyes, he could breathe; the atmosphere was warm, there was a peculiar odor perceptible. What did it all mean? Could this be the "other world"? Was he dead? If not, then where was he?

No, Yellowstone Jack was not dead, though for some time he was in great doubts upon this point. But then as his brain grew clearer, the unearthly sweet sound changed to the voice of some one singing a plaintive air at no great distance, and he could see that he was beneath the ground, his feet still lying in the water.

"Some more spook business, I reckon," the scout muttered uneasily, feeling at his belt; then as he found his knife still in its sheath, he gained more confidence. "Black Harris whipped one on 'em wi' a knife, an' I reckon I'm es good a man es he is; anyway, I'll make it es lively es I kin for 'em, ef they think to play off any o' thar tricks on me."

The singing had now ceased, and Yellowstone could just distinguish two voices, as though in conversation. Drawing his knife, he crept forward as silently as possible. His progress was almost immediately checked by what seemed to be a rock-wall. The voices appeared to pass through this. Yet, as he carefully felt of the obstruction, he found it gradually retreated upon either hand, like an enormous column. Following up the right hand curve, the trapper found the light steadily increasing in brilliancy; then he abruptly paused, with difficulty checking an exclamation of wondering surprise.

And truly 'twas a strange scene that met his gaze. A rude, gourd-shell lamp was suspended in the air, casting a flickering, uncertain light around. The floor here, that had been gradually rising ever since Yellowstone Jack left the water's edge, was elevated nearly to the height of his head. The walls were hung with skins, furs, articles of Indian dress and use, various kinds of weapons, such as bows and arrows, hatchets, knives and even rifles.

Seated upon a pile of furs, were two human beings—or "spooks," as the superstitious trapper devoutly believed—conversing together. Though widely differing types they were both beautiful—in that flickering light, startlingly so. Blonde and brune; the one dressed in civilized costume, though sadly worn and frayed, the other in Indian dress, beaded, embroidered and feather-worked. This last, Yellowstone Jack had seen before. She it was who sent him the warning note.

"You sigh," suddenly said the brune, in a clear, musical voice that strangely thrilled the listening trapper.

"And can you wonder—after what I have told you? Just think what has occurred since yesterday morning! The storm—the frightful runaway and rescue from what seemed certain death—then ~~he~~ was murdered—!"

"Do not weep," soothingly uttered the other, caressing the soft, brown locks of her companion. "At least your life is spared."

"And for what? Better had you let that fearful woman kill me at once—what have I to live for now? Nothing—all are dead—all murdered! And I am here—"

"With one friend, at least, lady. Mother has had spells—at their worst when the moon is full—but I can do anything with her. Now that I have claimed you as a friend, she will never lift finger against you. We will try and make you happy until you can be restored to your friends."

"I have none—they are all dead—murdered!"

"Perhaps not. They were strong in numbers and courage. They may have defeated the Indians. I asked mother to learn what was the result when she went forth this morning. She should have returned before this. Perhaps I can see her."

Yellowstone Jack saw the girl move toward him, and shrunk back tremblingly. He was not yet fully assured of her being mortal flesh and blood. She did not follow him. Instead he heard a faint, creaking noise; and then, a moment later, the figure reappeared, seemingly excited about something.

"There's a man outside—perhaps the very one who treated you so rudely," she whispered, breathlessly, yet distinctly.

"Brindle Joe, I'll bet a mule!" thought Yellowstone, and his courage rose wonderfully. "Ef she kin git out, so kin I. Ef they're spooks, then they know I'm here, an' if they ain't, I reckon I'm maa enough to han'le two gal-critters."

Reasoning thus, the trapper stepped boldly forward, confronting the women. Both shrunk back, but the darkest one quickly clutched a bow and pointed a feathered shaft full at the heart of the intruder. Yellowstone Jack did not flinch, though he held up his open hands in token of amity.

"I don't mean either on ye no harm, leddies—I I'd 'a' hed my way, I wouldn't 'a' come in a' tall. Fact is, I was brung hyar nightily ag'inst my will."

"Who are you—what do you want?" demanded the brune.

"I'm a man—leastwise I try to be one. Folks call me Yallerstone Jack, though my old man an' woman they called me John Henery Andrew Jackson Harvey. As to t'other question, that's easier answered. I want out."

At this moment there came a dull, thumping sound from the wall behind Yellowstone Jack, and turning quickly, he started back with a low cry, involuntarily drawing his knife.

A shadowy figure brushed past him and sunk down upon the pallet of skins, with a faint moan. It was that of the weird woman, who had dragged the trapper into the spring.

"Mother!" cried the dark maiden, kneeling beside her.

"Peace, child—you can do me no good. The shades are gone now, and I can see things clearly. I am dying—there! Why should you cry out and start back like that? Did I not say I was going to rest—to peace and everlasting repose? Blessed be the hand that sends me to rest at last!"

"Mother, you are bleeding—what could—"

"Peace, Kate—I am beyond your aid, and I thank God that it is so. And you, stranger," she added, feebly beckoning to Yellowstone, "come nearer. I know you now, for an honest trapper, for I am no longer mad. I believe I can trust you—I must—there is no one else."

"Hold my hand, Kittie, pet—I am sinking fast. I can feel a dropping, dropping here—in my heart—that tells me my minutes are numbered. Dry your tears—why do you weep at my good fortune? And they pain me, too. I would not like to leave you weeping. And listen—I have much I would like to tell you before I go home."

"If you swaller a little o' this it 'll give you stren'th," ventured Yellowstone, producing a small leathern flask of whisky, some that he had procured at the train.

"Thanks—I may need it. Now, Kittie, listen."

The dying woman in a faint, husky voice thus told the story of her life; a sad, mournful tale of sin and suffering. The reader will not require its repetition here, since portions of it have already been recorded. She was the sister of Bob Harris, the wife of Jethro Cowles, the woman who ran away with Mat Mole—or Zenas Kalloch, as he was really named. Tiring of her finally, he sold her to Neepaughwhere, the mutilated giant chief of the Blackfeet, and when she had reproached him with what she had given up for his sake, he struck her a brutal blow that unsettled her brain. Shortly after she fled from the Indians, taking with her a captive called Kittie, who, for several years, had called her mother, who, indeed, had never known other kindred.

"No, you are not my child, Kittie, though I have ever loved you as though you were," the dying woman added. "I do not really know wao you are"

though the Blackfeet believed you the sister of the man they call the Blood-Drinker. At least you were captured at the same time with him, while almost an infant, and Neepaughweese, whose favorite squaw had just lost her first-born, preserved you to take its place.

"You have an honest face," turning abruptly to the trapper. "I have no one else to look to. Can I trust you?"

"I reckon you kin. I don't brag much in the way o' bein' a good man, but this I kin say, I never stole another feller's traps or furs, unless mebber 'twas a Injine's. I never killed a livin' critter 'cept in fair fight. I never—"

"I will—must trust you. These helpless beings—will you—protect and—try to restore them—to—"

"I'll do my best," quietly responded Yellowstone.

"Kittie—my child—your hand. It's growing dark—ah!"

Her head fell back. The weird woman was dead. Kittie flung herself upon the corpse, weeping bitterly.

Minnie gently motioned to Jack, and drew aside. She anxiously questioned him, and great was her joy when he assured her that her father was still alive and well. And when the trapper went on to tell how he had left friends about to rescue Ada, how they had found Frank Maynard alive, though wounded, it seemed as though her heart would burst. She covered his hard hand with kisses, ending by hanging round his neck and sobbing hysterically.

And Jack—poor fellow!—stood there almost fearing to move, feeling awfully queer and deliciously miserable, something rising in his throat as though trying to choke him. And then, with a snort that would not have disgraced a grizzly bear, he began blubbering like a whipped schoolboy, to keep Minnie company.

During this interesting bit of by-play, neither of them had noticed the continued thumping upon the wall, and just at this moment, when Jack's fortitude gave way, a square portion of the wall suddenly gave way and a dark figure shot down through the opening, with a grunt of surprise and horror.

"Brindle Joe, by the jumpin' gemineezers!"

"Yellowstone Jack—I thort the spooks—oh, thunder!" and the trapper jumped to his feet, eying Minnie dubiously.

"Spooks is spooks, Joe, but this leddy hain't none. A frien' o' mine, pard—you've hearn tell on her; the same as the boss offered us the five hundred fer gittin' back ag'in, ye know," laughed the trapper, enjoying his comrade's dismay at the unexpected company in which he found himself.

"Bein' as you're all right, reckon I'll jest take a look a'ter our rifles," muttered the abashed trapper, retreating.

"Now that we know how to git out o' this queer hole, I reckon the sooner we start the better, miss," observed Yellowstone. "I wouldn't be s'prised ef the Injuns was to tackle the train ag'in to-night, an' mebber you'd be safer 'yar, but I s'pose you can't rest ontel you git back to them."

"Yes—let's go at once! It seems an age since I left them, instead of only a few hours. But—" and she looked doubtfully toward the still weeping maiden.

"You must talk her over. She can't stay 'yar alone. Tell her she will be wi' good fr'inds; besides, the old leddy wished it. Go now, while I take a look outside."

It was nearly an hour before Minnie could get Kittie to listen to reason, and then only by repeating the last wishes of the dead. But at length she raised her head.

"I will obey, since she wished it, though it is like tearing the very heart from my body to leave her and this place. I was happy here for years. She was ever kind and gentle toward me, even when the bad spell was upon her. And now—dead—dead!"

"She is better off," softly uttered Minnie. "You heard her, say that she welcomed death as a happy release from a living death."

The body was composed and wrapped in the furs that had often served as its bed. What tomb was so secure, so fitting, as that in which she had found refuge for so long?

Kittie knelt, with Minnie, and breathed a prayer for the repose of the dead, and then signified her readiness to depart.

Passing through the square aperture, Kittie raised the cover that secured the spring which held it in its place. And the tomb of the weird woman—of the Witch of the Enchanted Valley, was forever closed, never to be entered again by mortal being.

Yellowstone Jack and Brindle Joe gallantly assisted the women to descend, and then the quartette, with the keen-eyed trapper in advance, started for the emigrants' camp.

CHAPTER XX.

VICTORY IN DEFEAT.

YELLOWSTONE JACK and Brindle Joe brought into play their utmost skill, and managed to convey Minnie and Kittie safely to the emigrant camp, without coming into collision with any of the skulking enemy. And yet the young trapper had found time to solve the mystery that still hung around the Boiling Spring. A few adroit questions to Kittie brought it about. There was no further need of concealment, since 'twas very unlikely that she would ever revisit the retreat.

By means of a piece of prepared hide, the weird woman had hidden an opening in the side of the spring toward the mound. Firmly pinned to the ground, a foot below the surface of the spring, and weighted at the lower edge, the skin curtain hung almost motionless, or if it did sway a trifle now and then, it seemed but the reflection of the effervescent water. By diving into the spring—which was not

"boiling" from heat, since this spring had long been (and is still) noted for its magic powers, both as a tonic and a means of "making medicine," and men came scores of miles simply to quaff its waters—and pressing against the skin, the running water would quickly carry one into the mound. This also had been a spring, in ages gone by, and gradually subsiding, by some strange freak had left this refuge—like some gigantic glue-pot, seething in its hot water receptacle. A trap-door had been cunningly cut through the wall. A light horse-hair lasso had also aided Kittie and her adopted mother.

The reader must imagine the joyous meeting between father and daughter, for my pen is not nimble enough to do the matter justice. The greatest drawback was that both Ada and Frank were lying quite ill. The first transports over, Minnie quietly took her station as nurse, nor did she once abandon her post through all the excitements and horrors of the coming night.

It would have been impossible to move the wounded youth, even had the emigrants believed it prudent to resume their journey while so many of the enemy still hovered around them. So they contented themselves with strengthening their defenses and seeing that their weapons were in readiness for use.

Vernon Campbell, who seemed to consider himself as one of the party for good or ill, warned them that they might expect an attack that night, since the reinforcements could be brought up by that time, as the nearest Blackfoot village was not more than fifty miles distant.

And thus in watching and waiting the day slowly wore away. The emigrants were calm and composed, though the chances were greatly against them. Yet they were men, and could die, if die they must, like true prisoners.

The sun set, giving promise of a clear, cloudless night, nor was the pledge belied. The moon arose, bright and beaming; the little plain before the corral was rendered distinctly visible. The emigrants' position was such that they could be attacked only from in front, and to do this the enemy must fully expose their bodies to the deadly aim of the pale-faces.

There were those in the corral who secretly hoped and believed that the savages would not venture an attack under these adverse circumstances, but both Campbell and Yellowstone Jack argued different. The Blackfeet had suffered a heavy loss, and would be wild to wipe out the stain.

"They'll wipe us out this time, or bu'st," said Brindle Joe.

"Mebber they'll bu'st, then," chuckled Yellowstone Jack. "Wouldn't it be a sniptious sight—them all bu'stin'?"

The hours rolled rapidly by. Midnight came and passed by, without sign or sound of the enemy. Yet the emigrants held their posts, wakeful and vigilant. No danger of their growing careless while three men like Campbell and the trappers were on the alert.

Then, all at once, there came the rapid thud of many hoofs upon the hard ground, and a dark mass burst out from the pass, and scattering, dashed furiously down upon the corralled wagons. The wild yell of the Blackfeet broke the air. The critical moment had arrived. The enemy was upon them.

No man's pen could describe what followed. An active mind might grasp the idea—a vivid imagination realize some of the scenes—but words are powerless to picture the wild, terrific, sublime and horrible whole.

The headlong charge of the Blackfeet and outlaws was met by a deliberate, closely-aimed volley from the emigrants' rifles that covered the ground with dead and disabled horses and riders. But the rush was not even momentarily checked. The survivors, yelling and screeching like veritable demons, dashed on as though they meant to override the substantial wagons. Hurling their animals against the wagons, the foremost leaders leaped from the saddle, endeavoring to scale the barricade.

They were met by pistol-shots, blows from clubbed rifles and home-thrusts. Still a few gained an entrance, and recklessly attacking the emigrants, forced them to turn from the barricade, in order to defend their lives. And taking advantage of this, the Blackfeet, with every moment, dropped into the inclosure.

Vernon Campbell raged like a lion, and wherever his tall, lithe form passed, there death reigned triumphant. His wild war-cry rung out at intervals, and even in their madness the Blackfeet would shrink back from the terrible, dreaded Blood-Drinker.

Yellowstone Jack and Brindle Joe fought side by side, carving their mark in bloody, indelible characters upon the bodies of their foes.

And yet there was one who surpassed them all in acts of daring, strength and bloodiness.

This was the giant, Jethro Cowles. His madness seemed to have returned with the sounds of battle, and he plunged into the melee with a frantic delight that found vent in hoarse, roaring shouts. His weapon was an iron crowbar that he had picked up from where it had been used to roll over stones to strengthen the barricade. This he wielded with as much ease as though it had been a reed. He never had need to repeat a blow. Wherever the iron descended, death followed. Heads were shattered like gourds, limbs were crushed to atoms, and bodies mangled beyond recognition. Two arrows already quivered feather deep in his broad chest. Blood streamed from a dozen other wounds. Yet no savage arm seemed strong enough to touch his life.

And thus the furious death-grapple raged for full half an hour. But bravely, desperately as the emigrants fought, they were terribly outnumbered. Already their ranks were fearfully thinned, while two savages seemed to spring forward to take the place of every dead brave. The end was near. They must

soon yield to the overpowering force that hemmed them in upon every side.

But hark! that sound—what means it?

"Hooray fer Hoosier!" yelled Yellowstone Jack, in wild delight. "Sock it to 'em, boys—hyar comes the Brigade!"

And, far above the thunder of hoofs, above the din of the death-grapple, there came a clear, ringing cheer that only white throats can utter, as the Trapping Brigade under gallant Jim Bridger rushed to the rescue.

From a fight, the affair changed to a massacre. That night was a black one in the annals of the Indians. The trappers paid off many an old score. To use their own phrase, "ha'r jest more'n went wolf-in'!"

It was full daylight before the party of trappers all returned from their pursuit of the Indians. And not a girdle among them all but bore at least one bloody trophy.

Yet, alas! all was not joy. Over a dozen white bodies were placed in a ghastly row, awaiting burial.

CHAPTER XXI.

GATHERING THE THREADS.

JETHRO COWLES had fallen; the rest of the dead were emigrants. They were buried close to the spot where they fell, in the shadow of the great rock.

Yellowstone Jack had dispatched Hoosier to see if he could find and induce the Brigade to come to the assistance of the emigrants. Lest he should fail in finding them in time, Jack did not think it proper to excite hopes that might never be realized, and so had told no person of what he had done.

The trappers, under Jim Bridger, agreed to see the train safe back to the regular trail, as their trapping season was nearly ended anyhow. And by early dawn of the next day they were en route, Ada and Maynard being conveyed in easy litters.

Kittie, between whom and Minnie there had sprung up an ardent friendship, decided to cast her lot with the maiden whom she had rescued from the insane fury of the weird woman.

That evening, when they encamped, Campbell was told of the words spoken by the weird woman, and after some time, by questioning Kittie concerning the past, he became convinced that she was indeed his long-lost sister, whom he had thought dead—massacred with his mother and father. It was an affecting scene.

John Warren, who had so much cause for feeling grateful toward the young man, despite the fact that he had first been allied with the enemy, made Campbell a generous offer if he would continue with them, at least as far as their distant destination. And, if only for his new-found sister's sake, the young scout resolved to bid adieu to his terrible life, feeling that he had long since kept his vow of vengeance.

In due course of time the brigade departed, but not until the emigrants had fallen in with another train; with their combined forces, there was no danger to be apprehended from the Indians.

Does the reader think it strange that Yellowstone Jack joined the train as hunter? Of course Brindle Joe cast his lot with his "old pard." And of all those who were pleased with the young trapper's decision, assuredly Kittie Campbell was not the least. Though there had been no word of love spoken between them, the time could not be very far distant when it would be. And though Vernon Campbell shrewdly suspected the truth, he did not choose to interfere. Perhaps he knew how to sympathize with Jack. At least so Minnie mischievously whispered to the blushing Ada.

Both Ada and Frank soon regained their wonted health. And the terrible past was, by mutual consent, never alluded to.

It was not until he reached California that John Warren fully understood Mat Mole's object. Then he learned all.

His brother was dead—had been brutally murdered. Suspicion had fallen on his overseer; whose description exactly coincided with that of Gerald Manners—or the man of many names. It seems that Warren had been quite ill, and, fearing death, had made his will in favor of Minnie, his niece, who had ever been his favorite, because she was the youthful image of her mother, whom both brothers had loved, though John won her heart and hand. He wrote a letter to John, and hired Mole to convey it safely, in case of his death. But he recovered. Then Mole murdered him, took what ready money he had, and fled. On the road he forged a letter, requesting John Warren to come to California. This he delivered, as Gerald Manners, and paid assiduous court to the unknown heiress, but in vain. Frank Maynard already possessed her heart. Then he concocted the diabolical plot which he afterward attempted to carry out, ending in his discomfiture and horrible death.

John Warren proved his relationship and came into the murdered man's property.

Six months later there was a triple wedding on the cattle-farm. Need I give the names?

Maynard and Campbell have been taken into partnership by Warren, while Yellowstone Jack is their trusted overseer and "head man."

Brindle Joe still leads a single life, but sticks closely to his old pard. Wild horses couldn't pull him away. He is self-constituted "head nurse" of the establishment—and has his hands full, too. Brigham Young can scarce boast a larger family of "olive-branches."

THE END.

No. 1—Deadwood Dick, the Prince of the Road; or The Black Rider of the Black Hills.

No. 2—Kansas King; or, The Red Right Hand. By Buffalo Bill.